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UNDER *the* ALLIED FLAGS

A BOY'S ADVENTURES *in the* INTERNATIONAL WAR AGAINST THE BOXERS AND CHINA

By ELBRIDGE S. BROOKS

AUTHOR OF "IN DEFENCE OF THE FLAG," "WITH LAWTON AND ROBERTS," THE "STORY OF OUR WAR WITH SPAIN," "IN BLUE AND WHITE," ETC., ETC.

Illustrated by

W. F. STECHER

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PREFACE

IN pursuance of a desire to present to young people a series of adventures against a background of recent historical happenings the author of this book follows his "In Defence of the Flag" and "With Lawton and Roberts" with a tale of the war in China, thus making a series of adventure stories that deal in due succession with the war with Spain, the revolt in the Philippines, the conflict in the Transvaal, and the siege and relief of the legations at Pekin.

As in the preceding stories, "Under the Allied Flags" does not seek to go into the discussion of world problems and international rights; the author has endeavored simply to tell a story of danger and adventure, introducing to the readers of the companion stories, some familiar friends, and showing how pluck and heedlessness, valor and carelessness may lead a healthy and well-meaning American lad into scrapes and experiences that only a boy could blunder into and out of. At the same time he has tried to sketch types of the various nationalities who,

ranged under or against the allied flags, waged this war for the safety of diplomatic and other representatives in a hostile land, and helped to make the story of the war in China at once interesting, dramatic and inspiring.

If the story of Ned Pevear and his adventures "Under the Allied Flags" shall have taken to itself any of these qualities, the author will feel amply repaid for his endeavor to tell a tale of action founded upon facts.

For the facts drawn upon the author desires to accord credit to the excellent sketches of the conflict that have appeared in print, and especially to the graphic accounts of the American correspondents, Frederick Palmer and Oscar King Davis.

ELBRIDGE S. BROOKS.

BOSTON, *April*, 1901.

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UNDER THE ALLIED FLAGS

CHAPTER I

WHY NED JOINED THE MARINES

"THEY'RE signalling us, sir," the quartermaster reported.

"Looks like it," the captain of the *Orlando* replied. "Now, what under the sun—here! quartermaster, let's have the code book—or, hold on! two—eight—I can spell it out, I reckon. *H-e-a-v-e t-o. S-p-e-c-i-a-l O-r-d-e-r-s.* Special orders, eh? All right; heave to, it is. What in the nation is up now, I wonder?"

The captain of the United States transport *Orlando,* two days out from Hong Kong and a week from Manila had not long to wait. The engines were slowed down and the transport held herself drifting on the Yellow Sea, while a cutter from the detaining despatch boat swiftly cut across the intervening water. In the stern sheets sat a white bloused officer

and his hail speedily rang out as he approached the transport.

"Ship ahoy!" he called. "Is that the *Orlando* transport?"

"Ay-ay-sir, homeward bound," the mate replied.

Five minutes later, the lieutenant from the U. S. despatch boat *Montauk* stood on the deck of the *Orlando*.

"You have Captain Marshall with a detachment of marines on board, homeward bound?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," the officer of the deck replied.

"My compliments to the captain," said the lieutenant; "beg him to see me at once. I have orders for him from the admiral."

The messenger despatched with the summons had not far to go to find the captain of marines. In fact, that officer was already on deck, aroused by the slowing down of the *Orlando's* engines and the hail across the water. Red tape, however, must be unwound and the message was duly delivered.

The captain of marines saluted the lieutenant, and the latter turned over his order.

"A draft of three hundred marines, eh," he said as he hastily scanned the order; "to go to Taku at once? Hm! I'm not surprised. I thought something was up or would be soon, from what I heard at Hong Kong."

"Yes, captain," the lieutenant of the *Montauk* replied; "something is up with a vengeance. The Boxers are up; the Chinese are up, and we've got to protect our interests and our legations. The scalawags are tearing up railroads, burning down stations, attacking engineers and missionaries and no one knows what they may do to our people in Pekin. We've got to get more men into Taku harbor and up to Tien Tsin and Pekin, and we've got to do it quick. So the admiral is raking in all the marines and blue jackets he can spare from the fleet, and all the homeward-bounds he can recall. What number do you report, captain?"

The captain of marines was considering.

"Sick, invalided, expired term, leave of absence, transferred," he went over his list—"Well, most of 'em come under those heads, lieutenant," he said. "I can give you about thirty on orders, lieutenant, and we may pipe out a few volunteers."

"Count me as one, captain, You'll let me go, won't you?"

The speaker was a sturdily built, clean cut lad, not yet out of his 'teens, whose face showed exposure to an Oriental sun and whose eyes lighted up with the love of action as the captain went over his list of availables.

"Count you as one, Ned!" the captain replied with a laugh; "why, you're no marine, nor yet in

the service, even if you did have experiences. Besides, what will your father say?"

"He'll say I'm a chip of the old block, captain," the lad replied. "Why, he did the same thing when he was a boy, and he's always said to me 'never be afraid of anything except dishonor or run away from any duty that is a duty.' Now this is a duty, captain,—to relieve our folks at Pekin; and—you called for volunteers. I don't see but that lets me in, all right."

Captain Marshall smiled again.

"The service first," he said; "then—I'll think about you, Ned. I'd like mighty well to have you go back with me, if it's all right for you to do so. We're going to need all the availables we can get just now."

So certain was the captain of this need that he went over his list of returning marines again and again; but out of his force of one hundred and twenty he could really only count upon thirty-five or forty as available for active service. A long season in the Philippines had influenced or affected the most of those listed for a return to the states, and even for the excitement of possible service in China the homeward bound men preferred "God's country" of America to the fascinating mysteries of the Flowery Kingdom and the Forbidden City.

"Thirty-five, eh? Well, that's better than noth-

ing," the lieutenant from the despatch boat said when Captain Marshall had completed his detail. "Tumble their kits overboard and get 'em off to the *Montauk* as soon as you can, captain. We've no time to lose."

It was quick work; in a half hour the men and their belongings were transferred to the *Montauk,* and, instead of the long voyage homeward-bound across the Pacific, they were soon—some of them grumbling and some of them jubilant—steaming westward across the Yellow Sea to Taku and the treaty port of Tien Tsin. And Ned Pevear went with them.

Now Ned Pevear may be no stranger to certain of my readers who, perhaps, followed his adventures and experiences as, under three flags and two heroes, he saw service in the Philippines and the Transvaal, with Lawton and Roberts. If Ned really is an old acquaintance you will understand how, in the haste and hustle of transfer from the *Orlando* to the *Montauk,* Captain Marshall of the marines might be induced to accede to the lad's request and permit Ned Pevear to accompany him as volunteer; for Ned Pevear had a way of bringing people to see things as he saw them, and he was always a delightful and desirable companion.

Ned had seen service in two wars under two notable leaders; his experiences fitted him to engage in

similar enterprises where coolness in decision, steadiness in action and an utter absence of fear were important considerations; his father was an old soldier, who had transmitted alike his courage and his soldierly qualities to his son; the business, upon which he had been despatched to the Philippines by his father, had been completed, and he was now on his homeward way, free to consider fresh enterprises if he so desired.

To be sure he had been compelled to leave Tolman's—his school in California, as you may remember, to which he had returned after his home-coming from South Africa. But that had been his father's doing and not his. Major Pevear of the Bighorn ranches in Montana had need of one who knew the Philippines to look after a beef contract at Manila; Ned, from experience and acquaintance in that new possession of the republic had, naturally, been his first thought when the problem presented itself, and to Manila Ned had gone; there he had completed his business satisfactorily and was now returning home on the transport *Orlando*—the very same steamer in which, as the readers of "With Lawton and Roberts" may remember, he had his first unpleasant experience as "a gentleman stowaway."

But things were vastly different from that day of deliverance. Captain Thompson of the *Orlando*, gruff and grumpy though he could be, "thought a

days later, three hundred foreign troops were sent forward to guard the legations at Pekin, fifty of whom were from the American fleet.

But escorts despatched for the safety of the legations at Pekin were but as oil poured upon the rising flame of riot and massacre. Maddened by the false reports of their leaders the fighting element of the Boxers rose against the foreigners in mission "compound" and engineer camp and destroyed property, terrorized foreigners and natives, and vented on those they captured the relentless persecutions and nameless tortures of a people without sympathy, sentiment or the fear of pain.

Day by day the danger to the foreigners in Pekin increased, and when Ned Pevear sailed over the Taku bar the allied naval commanders had decided to march a force of marines from the international fleet to the relief of the beleaguered legations within the walls of Pekin.

The draft had already been made from the fleet; it included a hundred marines from the American ships under the command of Captain McCalla of the *Newark,* and the strength of the mixed command barely exceeded two thousand men, with the senior foreign captain, Vice Admiral Edward Hobart Seymour of the British Navy, as chief in command.

A relief column! That promised adventure, excitement, service in the cause of humanity—every-

thing that appealed to the adventurous and chivalric soul of so earnest a youth as Ned Pevear.

"Captain," he said to Marshall of the marines, "I want to join Admiral Seymour's expedition. Can't you fix it for me?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't want to, Ned," the captain replied, with enthusiasm. "I wish I had been detailed for that service, too. I'll see Captain McCalla and try to get a chance for you as volunteer aid, writer or something. I don't suppose you know Chinese, eh? If you did, I could arrange for you at once as an interpreter."

Ned knew much for a lad of his years; but he really felt obliged to acknowledge that he was not "fluent" in the Chinese lingo.

"I did get hold of pidgin English, Captain," he said, "both in California and the Philippines; but I'm afraid that wouldn't help much hereabouts."

"I'm afraid not, Ned," said the captain. "Pidgin English in California and the Chinese lingo of North China haven't much in common. I'll try another tack with Captain McCalla."

Whatever the tack was that Captain Marshall tried, it worked. Within an hour he saw the commander of the *Newark* and reported to Ned that Captain McCalla would be glad to have him accompany the expedition as special messenger or volunteer orderly in the marine contingent.

"And that means about anything the captain takes it into his head to detail you for, from writing dispatches to swinging a cutlass," Marshall explained. "It seems Captain McCalla heard of you and your Philippine experiences from someone or other and he says you're too good an all-round chap to lose. You are to report to him on the *Newark* to-morrow."

Ned was overjoyed. He was a lad of pluck and spirit, and, to such as he, the pluck and spirit of Captain McCalla of the *Newark* were peculiarly attractive.

He had heard the story of how the determined McCalla dominated the foreign council that debated the question of an advance for relief. It was a story well fitted to stir the American blood.

"Gentlemen," said Captain McCalla, as British, Japanese and Germans, Americans, French and Russians debated the question of advance and relief, "we have *talked* a good deal; now I will tell you what I will *do*. Our minister telegraphs that he is in danger. It matters not what others may or may not do. My entire force of one hundred blue jackets will take a train and start for Pekin to-morrow morning."

And start they did, the allies following the brave American's lead. And so, too, it came about that Ned Pevear joined the marines at Taku, and reported for duty as auxiliary aid to Captain McCalla of Admiral Seymour's advance.

The peculiar and manifold experiences of a young fellow like Ned Pevear became part of the gossip of camp and mess and when Sir Edward Seymour, the senior admiral of the allied fleets, learned that, in the American detail there was one who had seen scouting service as well in the Transvaal as in the Philippines, and who was acquainted with the conversational demands of three languages, besides pidgin English and Tagalog, he begged from Captain McCalla a loan of the young man for special service in the advance and Ned Pevear was despatched from Tien Tsin to accompany the advance and report upon the condition of the railway from Tien Tsin to Pekin.

Up the muddy-brown Pei-Ho, from where, swinging at their berths, the forty warships of the allied nations threatened the adobe forts of Taku, to muddy-brown Tien Tsin, the commercial capital of North China walled about with mud and the home of a million Mongolians and a well-kept foreign concession, Ned Pevear made his way in obedience to commands; and was soon steaming away from the port of Pekin to Pekin itself as the crudely armored train pulled out from the barn-like station beyond the pontoon bridge to feel the way for Seymour's advance.

Ned had experienced the ways and perils of armored trains both in the Philippines and in the

country of the Boers, but he, equally with his comrades of the advance, had little faith in the fighting abilities of the Chinese.

"Mighty slim chance for more'n a brush with em, I reckon," he said to an old sergeant of British marines who sat beside him in the armored car. "They tell me most of these Chinamen don't know a Mauser from a bolo and that they fight with spears and drum banging, and all that old fogy stuff. According to that we good British or Yankee blue jackets ought to be a match for anything from a hundred to a thousand Chinks, eh?"

The grizzled old sergeant looked at the lad beside him with poorly-concealed contempt.

"Now who's been a-stuffin' of ye like that, lad?" he said. "See here, I've seen these yellow chaps in more'n one scrap. I was with the allies forty years ago when they did this very job we're at to-day. I was powder monkey on the *Kestral* when Admiral Seymour—it was a Seymour then, too, you see—stormed the Taku forts and we and the Frenchies got more than we bargained for; I was on deck when Pekin fell at last, and I got good stuff when we looted the Summer palace; I got a peep at these fellows when Japan laid them out in the Yulu fight, and I've sized 'em up since we've been patrolling the treaty ports; and let me tell you these chappies aren't the same stuff the allies faced in '59 nor the Japs in

'97. The German drill-masters have made soldiers of them and their best fighters—the Bannermen—are just as well up in handling Mausers and machine guns as any armorer on our fleet."

"Yes, but those are the soldiers—a few of them," Ned replied. "We're not up against them yet; we're after the Boxers—and what do they know about fighting?"

"You'll find out, young chap," the old sergeant said. "You mark my word, the soldiers are standing in with the Boxers in this affair. They'll talk one way and shoot another. And as for these Boxers not being fighters—why, see here! lad—eh? what's that? Torn up the track have they? Here's trouble for us, then. No fighters, my Yankee boy? You just watch and see."

But Ned had not much time to watch. He was to learn by actual experience. For when the first division of the armored train bearing English and American marines had run some fifteen miles from Tien Tsin the railway track was found to have been torn up by the natives and the track menders were set to work under the protection of American and English rifles.

In the brush that flanked the track a skirmish line taken from the forces on the train was at once concealed.

"Jump in that hand car with me and see what we

can see ahead," the sergeant said to Ned, and the two, with a half dozen marines and laborers, ran to the limit of the relaid track, two hundred yards or so in advance of the train.

"They tell me you're great at a scout, young 'un," the sergeant said. "Just use your eyes and see if the land's clear, so that we can let in a gang of track men."

"Seems to be all clear, sergeant," Ned replied, letting his sharp eyes range far ahead of the hand car. "Clear all around," he continued, letting his glance linger an instant to the right and the left. "You know these Chin-Chins better than I do though, sergeant; but, all the same, don't you think it would be a good plan to beat the brush a bit off to the right and go back a piece before we let the track men—hullo! see there! Cut off, by George! There's a crowd of 'em breaking the brush. We're surrounded, sergeant."

The sergeant leaped from the hand car, his Mauser in his hand; he ordered three marines on the car to his side. Ned stood on the car, his rifle ready also.

"Not surrounded," said the sergeant. "Cut off; that's what we are. See, yonder! they're trotting down the track. They're going to wreck the train and leave us for the last."

"Attack an armored train with rifles, swords and

spears?" exclaimed Ned; "what do they think they are—iron clad?"

"They don't know the train is, lad," cried the sergeant with a chuckle. "Just keep your eye on that skirmish line. John Chinaman's going to have a surprise."

The sergeant was correct. Down the track in single file trotted the Chinamen, three hundred strong. Ahead of them lay the train, an easy prey, as they believed, for they evidently supposed the men on the hand car to be all there were of the train hands and guard.

Nearer and nearer the skirmish line they ran; then, when within less than twenty paces of the masking growth of brush a sharp order was heard and a volley that sounded like a single shot rang out from the brush.

With a yell of surprise the advancing file of Boxers stopped short, the rear bunched in with the advance and, beneath that deadly volley of the skirmishers, the whole quivering mass of men seemed to fall in their tracks.

They were up again; others joined them from the rear; another volley caught them for an instant; then the ambushers—English and American both—sprang from the bush with a rousing yell, and the over-confident Boxers turned and raced up the track for dear life, the skirmishers at their heels.

Tumbling Ned into the hands of the Boxers.

The sergeant and Ned Pevear with the half dozen riflemen of the guard stood at bay before the retreating mass, and as they came upon them a half-dozen Mausers rang out the little squad's defiance. Caught thus as they thought between two fires, the Chinamen broke in every direction, but a line of spearmen led by an officer with sword and gun dashed straight ahead at the hand car and before Ned could spring from his stand upon the car, the officer with fifty men at his back had broken through the defence of the guard and rushing at the hand car sent it spinning up the track and off the broken end, tumbling Ned Pevear straight into the hands of the retreating Boxers.

CHAPTER II

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE

THE thing all happened so quickly that Ned was down almost before he realized his danger. But he was on his feet as swiftly and clubbing his rifle laid about him to left and right, scarce giving his assailants time to fight or flee.

As it was the leader of the Boxers who had headed the rush on the hand car it was at him that Ned aimed the chief attack. He was a stout Chinaman, whose face seemed to belie his Chinese origin and when one of Ned's swinging blows took him with a thud in his stomach the officer was completely doubled up with the blow, and an expression,—certainly not Chinese, Mongol, nor Manchurian—escaped him.

"*Ach, himmel!*" he cried, as he recovered himself and lunged a furious blow at the boy with the clubbed Mauser.

But Ned had been in tight places before and knew how to defend himself at bay.

He did this so effectively, that he actually held back the brief assault by sword and spear made upon

him—brief because, with a ringing shout, the advance from the skirmish line came charging up the wrecked railroad track and a volley from the skirmishers sent the throng to the right about the hand car scattering in demoralized flight.

Strengthened by this rescue Ned sought to gain some glory from the affair and singling out the leader of the now flying Boxers, he fairly leaped upon him, clutched him about the neck, and with a well-remembered lock and twist flung him to the ground. There he simply sat upon him.

"Surrender!" he cried, "or I'll—" Then he remembered that his foeman could scarcely comprehend his English demand and he actually laughed aloud at his first fight on Chinese soil. He was floored by conversational difficulties.

With the laugh of the captor the countenance of the captive changed also and an ingratiating sort of smile accompanied the query "You will let me free, young Englander, yes? It was but in sport, this."

"What! you speak English?" cried Ned. "Surrender then, or I'll kill you."

"Again the sport," the prostrate one remarked; "You could not—would not kill me."

It did seem almost like murder to give the death stroke to "the under dog," even on the field of battle, and Ned, who struck only in the excitement of the charge or in self defence, confessed as much.

"Hanged if I can!" he replied with a laugh. "Get up and clear out before the marines are on you. They don't give quarter to you bloody Boxers. But, say!" he cried out, as with a scramble and a sweeping bow the man he had set free was up and off, "what are you doing among these murderers, you're not a Boxer, are you,—or a Chinaman?"

The officer was already scurrying toward his men who, heavily reinforced, were massing two hundred yards ahead.

"*Auf wiedersehen!*" came back the answer, and the released one joined the enemy.

"*Auf wiedersehen?*" echoed Ned. "Why, that's Dutch, isn't it—or German? It can't be possible there are any Europeans or white men leading that bloodthirsty crew. *Auf wiedersehen?* That means till we meet again or something of that sort. Well! if we do meet again I'll find out whether you're Dutch, Irish, Yankee, South Sea Islander or just plain Chinaman. You're something you ought not to be anyhow—and that's a Boxer."

Of Ned's companions on the hand car, two had been killed and two wounded in the Chinese onset, but the sergeant was in good condition and excessively angry.

"Rushed and tumbled over by a gang of laundrymen," he cried. "That's a fine to-do, that is. Here, you chaps!" he shouted to the advance of the skir-

mish line, "show some more ginger and hurry up, can't ye. Drive 'em back before they mass again. Hollo! lad; you're safe, are you? I thought they'd done for you, sure. What d'ye think about their fighting now?"

"They had spears as I said they had," Ned answered, "and they ran like sheep. That wasn't fighting."

"Don't crow yet," the sergeant retorted. "Look at 'em yonder. They mean to make another stand. Run back to the train won't you and tell 'em to rush it along. Our skirmish line is too small to stand against that rush."

Ned sped down the newly-laid track as the sergeant requested, while the skirmishers rallied about the old sergeant as a temporary advance guard.

"In force, eh?" the major of marines in the first of the armored trains said, as Ned delivered his message. "Is the track clear to the skrmish line?"

"Very nearly, sir," Ned responded. "I can show the engineer the limit."

"Jump into the cab then and play lookout," said the major, as he bade the engineer pull slowly ahead. "When we're as far as we can go we'll try a rapid-fire gun on 'em."

Slowly the armored train crept on along the half repaired track; already the Chinese mass was moving on toward the thin but determined skirmish line;

there came a shrill yell from the Boxer ranks and with a scattering volley they came with a rush upon the skirmish line.

"Swing open the port," cried the major of marines, unmindful of his mixing of terms in his excitement. "Now then, train that rapid-fire gun on 'em through the opening and when I bid ye, let the rascals have it."

Five hundred Boxers, spearmen and swordsmen, charged upon the skirmish line, while, across the flat fields that skirted the railway track, at least five hundred more hurried to join the assault.

There came a sharp volley from the skirmish line so timed in unison that again it rang out like one great shot; the advance of the Boxers wavered and shook for an instant; then the mass closed upon the skirmishers, while the shouts of the new forces swarming across the platted barley fields came in vengeful warning to the little band.

Suddenly the port or closed side door of the armor-defended car swung open and the harmless looking nose of a rapid-fire gun protruded itself.

"Got the range, boys? Now! let her go," came the command from the major.

Snip, snip, pling, pling! with bark and crack and snap in quick succession the terrible fusilade of the rapid-fire gun opened upon the startled and huddling mass of Boxers; the gun from the second car fol-

lowed suit and, stricken with surprise and terror, the whole mass of attacking Boxers broke and fled across the barley fields, leaving the ground strewn with the dead and dying—three hundred and more, —victims to modern improvements in war.

Ned Pevear was a good fighter, but he had a tender heart toward distress; the writhing mass of wounded heathen amid their dead brethren, the harvest of death on the grain fields of Yang-tsun, aroused his pity.

"By George! that's rough," he commented as he looked from the cab at the swath of death the rapid-fire gun had cut. "They're men even if they are heathen. Can't we help 'em somehow?"

He swung himself from the cab and put the same inquiry to the major of marines in the armored car.

"Help 'em? Why, lad, don't you know there is nothing more treacherous than a wounded Chinaman?" the major replied. "You hold your hands off if you wish to keep the breath in your body. There is no such thing as sentiment, honor or gratitude for favors in the whole Chinese race. Isn't that so, sergeant?" he added, as the old marine from the skirmish line, came up to report.

"Ay-ay, sir; true every time, ye are," the sergeant replied. "D'ye mind that scar, lad?" and he tossed back the hair from his forehead; "that's what I got for trying to save a Chinkie's life, back in the other

war. They don't know what decency toward an enemy is. Hands off, say I."

By this time the second armored train had pulled up behind the advance train and American and British marines fraternized while awaiting orders; the scouting line was pushed forward; the track layers were put to work, and Ned far in advance of the scouts was, with the old sergeant and his picked marines, keeping a sharp lookout for another attack.

Four miles to the rear of the armored trains, the rest of the expedition was closing slowly in; Russians and French, Japanese and Italians, Germans and Austrians were in the second section of the advance, the two trains first attacked being occupied by the thousand British and Americans who led the relief column.

It was a tedious advance; for when the line of destroyed track was reached the expedition could scarcely cover more than five miles a day. It was by no means a picnic excursion for the allies, and when, three miles beyond Yang-tsun, Ned and his advance scouters found the bridge destroyed, it looked as if the way to Pekin were blocked indeed.

This, too, was the opinion of a young Englishman whom Ned Pevear, having gone back to report obstructions to the major to whose force he had been assigned, met sprinting up the railway track.

He was a sturdy, well-built young Englishman, a year or two Ned's senior, and he was evidently in a state of mind.

"Bridge destroyed, eh?" he said. "*Hm!* that's a pretty howdy-do for a fellow who's due in Pekin to-morrow."

"In Pekin!" exclaimed Ned. "You didn't expect to get through to Pekin without any trouble, did you?"

"Expect! expect's got nothing to do with it, lad," the young Englishman replied. "I've got to; that's all there is about it."

"Whose command are you with—the admiral's—Seymour's?" queried Ned, who could not reconcile the stranger's civilian dress, with the very military air of the relief expedition. "Newspaper man, perhaps?"

"Newspaper? No," the English lad replied. "Do I look like a fighting correspondent? No, I have an appointment under Sir Robert Hart, inspector of customs, and my salary began from the date of appointment. I simply must get into Pekin and report, or all that salary is going to ruin. A clerk in the Chinese customs has no time to waste, bothering with an army as slow as this. I'm going to push on to Pekin; I can walk it faster than the relief train."

Ned laughed heartily.

"Walk it?" he cried. "And how about our friends the Boxers?"

"Well," the English lad replied, with a companion laugh, "they'll be like Stephenson's cow on the railway track, don't you know: 'it'll be vera bad for the coo,' Stephenson said."

"What is this customs appointment anyhow?" Ned inquired. "I don't think I understand exactly."

"You're an American, aren't you? Yes? I thought so," as Ned answered his query with a nod and the two exchanged cards—for all the world as if they were two young fellows who had met for the first time in their fathers' club, in London or New York, instead of on the firing line in the land of the Boxers, China the mysterious and murderous.

"Edward Pevear, Bighorn ranches, Montana," the English lad read.

"Thomas Dickson, Consulate of H. B. M. Valencia, Spain," the American boy read.

"Good enough," the Englishman said. "I'm glad you're an American. I know some jolly good American young folks. Don't know Don Martin, I suppose?"

Ned expressed his ignorance of the gentleman.

"You ought to," Tom Dickson said. "He's a plucky young chap. He was the son of the American consul in Valencia and he sneaked it across the

Atlantic in Cervera's fleet and we were in no end of tight places—he and I. You ought to know him."

"But what about the customs services here in China, Mr. Dickson?" Ned again inquired, not as much interested in Donald Martin as are, perhaps, some of my readers who may have followed the adventures of Donald Martin and Tom Dickson in that veracious record of their doings: "In Defence of the Flag."

"Why, you see—Mr. Pevear—" here Tom looked at the card—"hang it!—Ned, that's what I'm going to call you; that was Don's style;—the Chinese customs service is in charge of a British inspector, Sir Robert Hart, a first button mandarin. Sir Robert was planning to put the management of Chinese customs into the hands of young American and Englishmen of some education; he had made arrangements for their instruction by Chinese teachers and was gradually picking out his men. I had the honor to be picked—and my father shipped me over here to Pekin to report to Sir Robert Hart. That's why I've got to get there, hit or miss, Boxer or no Boxer. I sneaked it into this armored train at Tien Tsin, managed to smuggle myself aboard,—and here I am. I'm bound for Pekin on foot or horseback, train, camel or griffin, and get there I will—because I must, don't you know."

"What's a griffin?" queried Ned, who could only think of the fabulous monster of antiquity.

"Griffin?—why—Chinese pony—Mongol breed, don't you know? You try one once and you'll never forget 'em," laughed Tom.

"I have," Ned replied. "I know the breed, if I didn't know the name. But, see here, Tom!" following his new friend's lead, "that's all moonshine about your hiking it through to Pekin. You'd be murdered before you get there."

"What! by these Chinkies?" said Tom. "O, I fancy not. My hat! I've been cramming on Chinese for a year and if I can't bluff my way through, then I'm no Englishman. Besides, I have Sir Robert Hart's permit and pass, and they'll get me through. He's a way-up mandarin, don't you know."

"Same as Ward, the American was, before Chinese Gordon's day," said Ned. "Well, perhaps you can; but these Boxers, so they say, have mighty little respect for the Imperial government. They're China for the Chinese, you know, and they're down on these Manchus, from the Empress Dowager to the Bannermen. I tell you, Tom, there's going to be a merry Hail Columbia in this land of the Chin-Chins, and don't you forget it. You'd better stick to the allied army and let us get you through. We ought to be in Pekin in a day or two."

So all the world thought too, but all the world

had not reckoned on the temper of the Chinese nor the determination and strength of the Boxer uprising. The swarms of Chinamen seemed to come from every direction. With arms of all sorts in their hands, with hatred in their hearts and in their slanting, almond eyes, they harassed the allied advance, pressed about it on all sides, cut off its communication in the rear and so overwhelmed and cornered it that the advance ceased, the marines and jackies, brave and bold though they were, were actually surrounded and threatened by the horde of foreign-hating Boxers, until the relief expedition sorely needed relief itself, and for fully ten days was lost to the world, its fate in doubt, its ranks thinning from sickness and constant attack and its relief, quite as much as that of the ministers in Pekin, a necessity and a duty.

"Pevear," the major of marines said, "the admiral needs a courier to ride back to the fleet with tidings of our condition. It calls for instant action. Can you try it?"

"I will do it, sir," replied Ned promptly. "It is only going back the road we came, and I'm a good dodger."

"You'll need to try your dodging here, I fancy," the major said. "But if we are not reinforced we're in a bad box. These Boxer chaps can't stand before us in the open, but in a country seething with excite-

ment and full of those who hate us, they can harass and cripple us by simply trying to crowd us off the earth by their numbers. So we must have help and have it quickly. When can you leave?"

"As soon as you are ready, sir, I am," Ned replied.

"Good!" cried the major. "In half an hour, the train will be ready to take you back to Yang Tsun, where our connections end. Beyond that point the natives are in control. You'll find ponies ready, and if you need assistance or comrades, the commander of that outpost will detail a special escort; though what good an escort will do you, lad, when the entire advance is checked, I'm blest if I can say."

"I'm afraid an escort would only make trouble, major," Ned declared. "This is one of the cases where a fellow must go it alone. I'll get through if I can, sir," he added, "but if I can't—"

An expressive silence completed the unfinished sentence only too well. The major shook the boy's hand.

"We're in a bad strait, lad, there's no denying that," he said. "I never supposed these maniacs meant business so thoroughly. I don't believe Admiral Seymour did. But here we are—trapped. It wouldn't look well for Yankees and Englishmen, to say nothing of the other nations, to let themselves be jugged by a lot of Paythans. But we've got to have

help; and you're the chap to be depended on. Do the best you can for us—and, if you're floored,—why, you're floored, that's all!"

A half hour later Ned was on the armored train which was to push back to the endangered rear. As the train pulled away from the advanced camp Ned heard a cheery "how d'ye do" and a young fellow swung himself into the car. It was the English lad, Tom Dickson.

"I've got to try another tack, Ned," he cried. "These fellows won't let me push on to Pekin; they say we're surrounded and that it's death to try. Fact is, they ran me out of camp because I'm a civilian and they're sending me back to Tien Tsin. But Pekin is my point and I'm going to make it, by hook or by crook."

Ned laughed.

"You're a determined chap," he said. "But seems to me we're in one of the places where you can neither go ahead nor fall back. It's just about as easy to get to Pekin as it is to go back to Tien Tsin. That's what I'm off for,—to hurry up the relief."

"How?" queried Tom.

"Blest if I know, yet," Ned answered. "But there are more ways than one to do a thing, and if I can't work myself back in one way I will in another —that's all there is about it."

"That's the talk! My hat! but you're the man

for me," the English lad exclaimed. "Don't you want a mate? Who knows but I may get to Pekin by going around the wrong way. Let me ride back to Tien Tsin with you, eh? We'll cut our way through these Boxers, see if we don't. And I talk Chinese, don't you know."

Ned welcomed the comradeship of the English lad, though he could not yet believe that there was so much danger in his mission as the major of marines intimated. He had scouted in the Philippines; he had performed messenger service in the Transvaal; he had been in many a close corner and many a tight place; but he had always found his way out at last, and with the ready optimism of youth he assured himself that he would be able somehow to find his way out of this Chinese puzzle of breaking through the circling and encompassing maze of fanatical Chinamen.

But the maze became even more encompassing as the train came to the end of its line. Beyond Lang Fang, on the north the tracks to Pekin had been torn up; behind Yang Tsun on the south the tracks to Tien Tsin had been destroyed; communications were cut with the base of supplies at Tien Tsin and the supporting fleet at Taku; and even had Admiral Seymour determined that the only way to get to Pekin was to force his men on and on through the living Chinese wall he would find that way blocked beyond

the possibility of cutting through; for life in China is cheap and the gap opened in that living wall before the allies would be closed again and again until the baffled advance had spent itself in attacks that led to nothing but killing off or wearing out.

So when the train reached Yang Tsun and Ned reported at headquarters and demanded the pony for his ride to the South, he found that Admiral Seymour had decided not to send for relief but to withdraw his whole force back to Tien Tsin.

"Further advance by rail is impossible," he said, when Ned reported his readiness to break through for relief, "we are short of provisions, hampered with our wounded, cut off from communication with our base and absolutely out of supplies. We must move as a whole, living on the country and dropping back until we can get to some point where if a relieving force does not reach us it will be really a relief and not an additional incumbrance. So, sir, I thank you for your readiness, but shall beg you to defer your ride for relief until we are in better situation for it."

Both Ned and Tom would have grumbled at this decision had they not seen its force. In a successful retreat, for retreat it was, safety depends upon keeping together or retreat degenerates into rout.

Even success in retreat seemed often in question. From village to village and station to station the

Boxers swarmed about the little force of allies seeking to cut off their retreat and decimate their ranks. Defeated in one village, the Boxers would retire to the next and selecting the best positions for attack, skillfully retard the retreat that was really an advance, for though hampered by his wounded and baggage, Seymour still drew nearer to Tien Tsin, clearing the forces that threatened him, now by well directed musketry battles or now at the point of the bayonet.

So, step by step, the retreat that was an advance kept on and after four days of continuous fighting, with a loss of sixty killed and three hundred wounded, he arrived after a night march in sight of the imperial arsenal above Tien Tsin.

Here the gallant band made a stand, and here fresh armies of Boxers blocked their way into the city. But as the allies occupied the river bank opposite the arsenal the white flag fluttered out and unarmed Chinamen made friendly signals and advances.

A boat pulled across the river to parley with the enemy, and Ned, as courier, was in the boat, so that, if the Chinamen were really friendly, he might gallop through to the city and arrange for relief. The boats with the wounded stopped in midstream while below, on one bank of the Pei-ho, the allied forces commanded the Chinese positions on the further side.

Little by little the boat pushed its way; the friendly signals were redoubled and a throng of Chinamen, without arms, crowded to the water's edge.

Suddenly, through the welcoming advance, with shouts and cries, burst an armed throng; the unarmed welcomers were armed at once, and from bank and field and arsenal wall came a burst of fire and shell, and the boat bearing the parleying allies sank, riddled with shot, overset by the heavy and treacherous assault of the truce-breaking Chinamen.

CHAPTER III

THE RELIEF OF THE RELIEF

NED PEVEAR clutched desperately at the sinking boat as he went down, but it was forced away from him. Ned, however, as you perhaps remember, was a sturdy swimmer and not only kept afloat but, sinking below the surface, tried some of his best underwater swimming. Above him the shots flew and whistled as the outraged allies replied to the treachery of the crafty Chinese.

Hot and heavy came the rifle fire in front; over the river above the armory Major Johnson and his marines and seamen dashed, in a resistless charge, while, below, the Germans silenced two of the Boxers' guns before the arsenal wall and, crossing, captured the guns, drove off the defenders of the wall and joining the main body of the allies, massed for a combined attack, stormed the gates of the arsenal, drove off its defenders and forcing an entrance, held the captured armory and its great stores of ammunition and supplies.

But they could not relieve Ned Pevear. For even as the lad, dodging the storm of hail that flew across

the river, swam down to where a native river boat offered a temporary asylum, he found himself swiftly drawn out of the water, and as the boat drifted down the river and away from the battle line the courier who had been a second time baffled was flung unceremoniously into the hold; the hatches were clapped over him and the boat was rushed swiftly down the shallow river to Tien Tsin.

For two hours Ned lay there in the uncertainty of darkness, expecting every moment to be hauled out to death, or stabbed where he lay in the gloom.

Suddenly the hatch was shoved aside and an inquiring face looked down upon the captive.

"Are you English?"

The query was in admirable English, though with an unmistakable Eastern tinge.

"No, sir; I am American," answered Ned. "Am I your prisoner?"

"You seem to be, sir," the captor answered, "though truly I cannot say. I am neither of the Righteous Harmony Fists, whom you wrongly call the Boxers, nor am I of the Imperial troops. I am a Chinese merchant, Ah Wong, by name and I have been two years in your Omaha. Will you permit one American to rescue another?"

Ned fairly stared at his rescuer.

"Why, that is fine!" he exclaimed. "Kindly let me go back to the allied forces above or send me into

the consulates in Tien Tsin. I must return to duty."

"All in good time my friend," the Americanized Chinaman replied. "It is not wise to try the one or attempt the other. The Harmony Fists are clenched in anger and a white man is in danger, when found alone in the midst of his enemies. Pray leave the affair in my hands. I will see you to safety."

The American would have objected to this decision but he realized that placed as he was he was powerless, so he accepted the situation as was his wont, determined to keep his eyes open for possible opportunities.

An opportunity came in due time. For as the river-boat drifted out of the fray and down the Pei Ho under the walls of Tien Tsin Ned began to realize, what the Chinese merchant from Omaha had assured him that the foreigners in the city of Tien Tsin were no better off than the allies outside its walls.

The whole province of Shan Tung seemed aroused against the invaders. The retreat of Admiral Seymour inflamed this spirit of opposition and led the Chinese to believe that they could overcome, drive away or put an end to the unwelcome foreigners.

"Kill the foreign devils!" The Boxers' war cry rang through northern China and thousands and still other thousands hurried to join the hordes surrounding Seymour's plucky force and the imprisoned foreigners in Tien Tsin.

"My friend, it is a misfortune," the Omaha merchant said; "but who can conquer the Chinese who rise against you? I am of America. I am for a new China, but my brothers here will not heed my advice and would send all foreigners to death. And can you blame them? It is China for the Chinese as it is America for the Americans. The best thing on earth is happiness, and my brothers of China from the experiences of the centuries, have learned wisdom and do not find happiness in the race for wealth, the struggle for power, the haste and hurry and worry of my brothers of America. Nothing troubles my people here so long as the conscience is clear, and they hold it as a matter of conscience to keep out the new things the outside world would force upon them —things new to you but old, very old to us. But I do not feel that way. I am of America. I love my brothers of America. I would help *you,* where I would not lift a finger for your so-called allies— allies only in name who would push America to the wall, in commerce, in possessions, in the struggle for power. They would, but, hear me! they dare not now. They have heard of your Admiral Dewey at Manila and his guns have made them fear the great America they once despised. So they invite your people to come and help carve up China."

"But we don't want to carve China," Ned replied. "We only wish to have the door open so that we can

come in and trade with China; we only insist that what Americans are here shall be protected,—missionaries, consuls, business men, all."

The Omaha merchant smiled incredulously.

"The American plans well and shrewdly," he said. "If China is to save herself she must be American and not Chinese. But, what will you? I am but one, and those who hate the foreigners—from Empress to China boy—are millions."

Ned, too, felt just then that numbers had won the day and he reasoned that, in his position, discretion was the better part of valor; but even as he weighed the chances of escape or action, the boat glided into the narrow muddy-brown roadstead of Tien Tsin, past the walls of the native city on the left bank and under the lofty buildings of the foreign concession. There came from seething Tien Tsin the sounds of restlessness and riot. The smoke of burning buildings hung above the mission chapels of the native city, and the flames were drawing nearer and nearer the foreign concessions. Ned felt that he simply could not float by, disregardful of the danger of the Europeans in threatened Tien Tsin. Without stopping to consider his own safety and, mindful of the desperate situation of the relief force above he slipped over the side of the river-boat while its owner and crew were excitedly endeavoring to carry her out of the dangerous neighborhood of the

concession walls and, relying on his excellent swimming powers, was soon striking out for a break in the river wall of "the bund" in the British concession.

He did not know it was the British concession; all he was seeking was a footing on dry land; but as his head emerged from the river beneath the surface of which he had been doing his "under water" act, he heard a challenge and found himself covered by the guns of the marine guard.

"Hi, there! keep off, you bloody Chinaman or we'll fire," he heard them say.

He lifted head and hand above the turbid tide.

"I'm no China boy; I'm American," he cried. "Help me out."

"Yankee or no Yankee, you don't land here," one of the guards shouted back. "Them's our orders and—By Jove! he is Yankee, sure enough," he broke out as Ned, despite the challenge floated yet nearer to this questionable safety; "don't fire on him, boys. He is one of us, I fancy."

"One of us! well, I should say so. Don't you chaps dare fire at him. My hat! it's what's his name—Pevear—Ned Pevear, from up the river. Lend a hand, lads. Fish him out. I thought he was done for, sure; and blest if he hasn't been swimming down the Pei-ho from above the arsenal."

The excited and explosive command was as ex-

citedly obeyed by the marines on the bund and Ned Pevear was forthwith fished out of the Pei-ho only to clasp the outstretched hand of Tom Dickson the English lad, who, after all, had got into the city before him.

"How under the sun did you get here first, Tom?" he queried as he stood dripping and astonished on the embankment.

"On a griffin, lad," replied the smiling Tom. "That's lots better than swimming. How did you stand it so long? My eye! you're a oner in the water."

Ned explained, and Tom, expressing his doubts as to the truth of the Omaha merchant, congratulated Ned on his escape from more treachery.

"That fellow was fooling you, I'll wager," he said. "I wouldn't trust a returned Chinaman any more'n I would the home bred article. They're all tarred with the same stick, and I have heard that you Yankees don't really welcome the Chinese in your parts. They bear malice, they do, in spite of all their bland and childlike smiles, and most of 'em carry knives up their sleeves. I'll bet your Omaha friend did, too."

Ned was more charitable than this, but he was glad nevertheless to be among his own and proceeded with Tom to make his report to the American consul at Tien Tsin.

It was superflous information, for Tom had already made the same report. But one corroborated the other, and the senior officer in command hastened to call a council as to the possibility of relieving Admiral Seymour at the arsenal.

The discussion was but a brief one. For the ugly truth was apparent to all that instead of being able to afford relief to Admiral Seymour's column above the city, the foreigners in Tien Tsin themselves needed relief. The city was entirely in the hands of the natives; the foreign concession was surrounded and threatened; the least effort at relief, the least aggressive move by the fleets at Taku might make the foreigners prisoners in a beleaguered city, and inflame yet more the Boxers and their sympathizers.

" Seymour must fight his way through," was the decision. " We need his force here even more than he needs us—and we cannot go to him."

Scarcely had this decision been taken when alarming reports came from the port of Taku, twenty-five miles below. Desiring to land forces from the warships for the relief of Admiral Seymour, Pekin and the missions, the foreign powers saw the necessity of obtaining the command of Taku harbor, dominated by seven mud-walled forts. They requested the Chinese commander to give up the possession of his forts, giving him a few hours for decision. Before the time limit was up the forts fired on the fleet;

the fleets replied, and after a six-hour engagement the defences of Taku were in the hands of the allies; their flags were flying in possession.

When these tidings came up the river to Tien Tsin the Chinese were furious. The "Foreign Devils" were evidently bent on invasion and conquest; the only course open to Chinamen was to rise against all foreigners and sweep them into the sea.

At once Prince Tuan, the Chinese leader, led forward his thousands to the slaughter of the foreigners. The Boxers and soldiers within and without the city surrounded the foreign quarter—or concessions; armed troops with modern guns and artillery assaulted the allied reserves inside the walls—a scant two thousand against a host.

The situation was desperate. All Northern China seemed banded against the foreigners. Seymour was besieged in the Imperial Arsenal without the city; the allies within seemed hardly able to hold their frail defences, and a double relief was necessary. Tien Tsin was fighting for its life.

"The fleets must help us; they must send us reinforcements," said the Russian rear admiral, who commanded as senior in Tien Tsin in Seymour's absence. "Who will ride with a summons for relief?"

And when Ned Pevear heard the inquiry he answered it quickly.

"Let me try," he said. "I will ride to Taku."

The Russian "sized up" the eager and willing lad.

"Ha! it is ever young America for action," he said. "You shall go, my friend, but let me send a Cossack escort with you."

"I had rather have Tom Dickson," the American replied; "but the Cossacks may keep us company if they don't get in our way."

The admiral laughed.

"Company? The rough riders of the steppes!" he exclaimed; "and how might they get in your way, little brother?"

"This is no Wild West show," Ned exclaimed; "this is business; and I don't wish to ride hampered or be saddled with responsibilities."

"I speak but for your safety and for the cause of the allied forces," the admiral explained. "See to it that responsibility does not saddle you, my young American. The Cossacks shall go as a reserve escort rather than as impediments. Select your comrade and ride for life or death."

One hour later Ned and Tom Dickson were in the saddle; the three Cossacks insisted upon by the Russian admiral awaited them before the door of the Russian consulate and the ride for relief began.

The foreign concessions were already surrounded and in danger as the riders passed the gate; the shells were screaming over Gordon Hall, while the river

front and the concession walls were both within the line of fire; but out from the beleaguered city the five ponies sprang, urged on by whip and spur, and clearing the south gate, rode for dear life to Taku.

Taku by the highway and not by the railroad is fully fifty miles from Tien Tsin, and over this narrow way they galloped for relief. The drilled soldiers and artillerists, investing the city were skilfully avoided; but for the armed Boxers and undisciplined mobs they cared little; the yell of the Yankees' charge that scattered the Filipinos in Luzon, the sturdy British cheer that rang in victory over the stubborn Boers, the stinging whips of the Cossack rough riders that are the terror of a Cossack dash, scattered the encompassing Chinamen left and right; through village after village the five rode at breakneck speed, unharmed by Chinese bullets, unstayed by Chinese obstacles, their whips their main weapons of attack and defence, their spurs keeping the sturdy if unkempt "griffins" or Chinese ponies up to the work.

All that afternoon and all the night they rode, and when daylight fell upon the distant walls of the forts of Taku, defended by the guns of the allies and protected by the forty warships of the allied fleets, they knew their work was done and that assistance was at hand.

"To the admiral's flagship!" Ned ordered the boatman at the landing, and while Tom hurried to

the British commander, Ned sped down the harbor to the *Newark,* the flagship of Admiral Kempff.

"From Tien Tsin?" the admiral demanded, as Ned almost dropped on the deck; "what's wrong there?"

"The city is in danger, sir," Ned reported; "the Chinese troops and Chinese cannon are threatening the foreign concessions and the Russian admiral says that unless relief or reinforcements are speedily sent the refugees and allies in the city will be overpowered and killed."

It was the first intimation that Admiral Kempff had received of the peril of Tien Tsin. Before night a council was called; reinforcements were decided upon; the tidings of danger went singing over the wire around the world, and the allied powers hurried away new armies for the relief of Tien Tsin.

From Manchuria and India and the Philippines, from French treaty ports and German concessions, from near-by Japan and far-off European colonies, the ships of war and transports came hurrying across the sea and all the world stood in grim defiance before the dragon-guarded door of the Forbidden Kingdom.

But first in Taku hasty means for relief were at once set on foot and three thousand men of all the allied nations hurried out of Taku and headed for Tien Tsin

Ned found a place in the advance of one hundred and thirty marines despatched in the first section of the American reinforcements under Major Waller.

Tom Dickson and he had parted company; for Tom, reporting on the British flagship, marched out with the British column, while Waller's little body of Yankee marines had pushed ahead in the advance.

It was a difficult duty which the new relief column had undertaken. With less than three thousand men it must meet and disperse the hordes of yellow clansmen, soldiers and Boxers, who surrounded and threatened the beleaguered foreign garrison in Tien Tsin; if absolute defeat were not possible the relief force must at least revictual, reinforce and get supplies of ammunition to the harassed force within the walls and help the besieged hold off the encompassing Chinamen until a sufficient force of allied troops should fight its way from Taku.

This, the little vanguard of Waller's one hundred and thirty marines and the Russian colonel with his four hundred Russians must needs first attempt, and they went to work undaunted by the mighty odds.

With two field pieces the train conveying this advance steamed to the limit of the protected railway, nearly halfway to Tien Tsin; thence the men pressed ahead, on foot, while the train returned for reinforcements.

" Beware of ambuscades just before you reach the

city," came the warning to the relief columns; but Waller and his men scarcely needed this advice, for an ambuscade was the one thing most expected by those who had fought in China jungles and Luzon swamps

Within eight miles of Tien Tsin the railway was found to be destroyed and the vanguard cautiously felt their way. Over the sorghum-fields, climbing mud banks and sand hills the little force traversed the great alluvial plain that stretches from the Yellow Sea to the hills behind Pekin, but, before they were in sight of Tien Tsin's mud built walls, the enemy was upon them near the lower arsenal and caught by a heavy fire at front and flank, the five hundred were forced back by five thousand, after a stiff four hours' fight.

They waited only for the second detachment to come up; then they went at it again.

"Hello, Tom! there you are, eh?" cried Ned, as Commander Cradock's British naval brigade, just up from Taku, came hurrying to the support of the checked advance. "I thought I was going to get in ahead of you. Now we'll go in together."

"First stop on my new way to Pekin," said Tom; "longest way round is the shortest way home, you know."

"All right as long as you take me in with you," Ned declared. "We ran up against a host and they

were too much for us. But now you've come I reckon we'll be up and at it again."

Ned was right; Major Waller scarcely let the night pass before he was again afield. At four in the morning with his own slender command and Cradock's five hundred British marines, he marched in two columns on Tien Tsin. Side by side the allied flags pressed forward, England and America in the advance; the Germans and Russians hammered away at the arsenal to little avail; but the Yankee and Britishers led by Waller relieved this assailing force and combining the detachments, dashed straight at the embattled walls of Tien Tsin.

One of the defending parapets was particularly vigorous in resisting the assault; the shells from its modern guns burst over the allied attack and severely checked the advance.

Waller's blood was up.

"We'll carry that wall, boys," he cried, "or we'll know the reason why," he said. "Now, then! at 'em. Forward!"

The Yankee marines, the Welsh Fusileers and Captain Gwynne with his British marines, a slim but determined forlorn hope, charged headlong across the open and scaling the walls like rats, actually drove the Chinese defenders from their guns, surprising and scattering them so by this headlong

dash that the Chinese garrison simply could not withstand the charge.

Back in terror they fell before the onward rush of the "foreign devils;" their armament, sufficient if well handled to hold a brigade at bay, was silenced, and when Lieutenant Jolly's forty marines swarmed over the second parapet even the disciplined troops of China turned into flight, while the British company that followed at Jolly's heels added the last touch to the terror of the defenders when, springing to the captured armament on the parapet, they turned the rifled cannon and the nine pounders upon their late assailants and sent destruction into the Boxer ranks.

Ned Pevear, as a volunteer aid, was foremost in the exciting rush, while Tom Dickson, running with the British blue jackets, fought beside his friend.

Over the parapet they leaped together and Ned seeing the dragon flag fluttering above the stricken Chinese ranks made a dash for it, while Tom whirled about one of the nine pounders, and levelled the piece at its late owners.

For an instant the Chinese soldiers sought to defend their standard, but Yankee cutlasses and British pistols were too much for them, and as the defenders turned in flight Ned made a dash at the Imperial flag, tore it from the bearer's hand and as the

officer in command made one final lunge at the young assailant of the colors, Ned gave him such a back-handed stroke as tumbled him over in a heap and the next instant the American stood alone, the captured flag in his hand.

He heard a voice at his feet.

"Quarter! quarter!" it demanded in broken English, and Ned, remembering the universal opinion that no Boxer should be permitted to live, hesitated an instant.

"Are you a Boxer?" he demanded, looking down upon his suppliant.

"*Nein, nein,*" came the reply in German. "You are the young American who saved me once before, no? I am forced against my will. Spare me and I can lead you to loot, valuable loot, yes. A second time let me go free. See, I surrender my sword."

Ned looked closely at the man. His German and his broken English surely were not Chinese, and then Ned recalled the face. It was that of the officer whom he had overthrown and then set free when, with Seymour's men, he stood against the Chinese hordes on the broken railway tracks at Lang Fang.

CHAPTER IV

NED'S PRISONER

"WHAT are you, anyhow—Chinaman, Dutchman or renegade Yankee?" Ned demanded. "And why are you here after I freed you once?"

"I am a German, impressed into the Imperial ranks, because I had been drill master," the prisoner replied. "Help me to mine own again and I will yield myself prisoner to you—to you and not to Frenchmen, Russian or German, I pray. See, I will give you my parole."

Leniency or help to wounded and prisoners had been the first practice of the allies as representatives of Christian nations; but when it was seen that they were faced by fanatical hordes who neither knew nor practiced mercy, the word had quietly spread through the armies that to Boxers, as to murderers, no quarter was to be shown.

The question had never come so closely to Ned Pevear before. When brought face to face with it, however, he could not decide upon what seemed to him murder.

"German impressed into the Imperial troops,

eh?" he said. "Well, that lets you out; you're no Boxer. Get off those heathen togs and dress like a white man once more, and then over with us into the city. It's no place for masqueraders; you've got to be for us or against us. See! there's a poor fellow who has no use for clothes of any kind. Get into his coat and trousers quick, and over the wall with me."

There was scant time for hesitation. The allies were swarming over the second parapet; the Chinese were making a bold stand in defence of their town, and great guns upon the Chinese walls were being pounded into silence by the rapid-fire guns which the allies rushed into position.

The dead German soldier was quickly divested of coat, cap and trousers and the impressed German captain of Chinese troops, "made a white man again" as Ned declared, was beside his deliverer, leaping across the captured parapets of Tien Tsin's outer wall. Then, suddenly, resistance turned to retreat; the leap of the "foreign devils" over the mud barricades quite terrified the defenders of the walls; they broke before the charge and, neck and neck, Americans and British led the storming party through the breach they had won.

"Great work, eh, lad," came Tom's cheery greeting as Ned with his captured flag and his "redeemed Boxer" halted at the rendezvous near the Taku gate. "I fancy honors were even with us; we both

crossed the string together. Hullo! caught a banner, did you? Good for you. And who's your friend?"

Ned passed the gilded staff of the captured banner to Tom Dickson for inspection.

"Don't really know him yet," he replied, with a laugh; "he's a captive of my bow and spear, anyhow, Tom. A German in the Boxer ranks, only I changed his togs and made a Christian of him to save his life."

"A renegade white man!" cried Tom. "By Jove! he's not fit to live, he isn't. Better turn him over to the Germans for discipline. They'll reason with him, I'll wager. There's no quarter for such cattle, you know," and the English lad threw a vindictive glance toward the captured renegade.

"Sir, I appeal to my captor," the German replied. "I gave my parole, and I have fought beside him in the charge."

"That's like you," said Tom. "You fellows are bound to be on the winning side, never mind who's hurt. Don't have anything to do with him, Ned. He'll get you into trouble. A Christian leading these pagans! My hat! there's no punishment too severe for such low-downs; eh, boys?"

Tommies and marines were gathering about the imperilled German, and they echoed the English lad's impulsive words.

"True for ye. That's so, boy," came the response. "He's no right to live; down with him!" they shouted.

"What are you talking about, Tom," demanded Ned; "this is my business, this is. I promised this man his life if he'd join us, and he did. He's one of those impressed drill masters; he had to fight with the Chinks or die; and I reckon he wasn't fighting much. I've faced him twice and he didn't do a thing. Besides, Tom, he's my prisoner; and I'm not going to give him up. Who'll take him?"

As he spoke Ned stepped before his prisoner and clutched the staff of his prize banner significantly. Englishmen and Americans hustled towards him defiantly. Then the bugle blew for assembly, and with the easy laugh of victors the little allied force fell into order as Major Waller and Commander Cradock came hurrying down the line.

"Boys," said the major, "you did well. But, watch out! we've got to hold this line until the relief comes up. They're not far behind. Can you do it?"

"Aye, aye, sir," rang out the hearty English and American response, and the major, his eyes beaming with pride and determination, nodded approval.

"I knew it," he said, "and so did the commander here. We can trust you,—ah, lad, you got one, too, eh?" he added as he caught sight of Ned's captured

standard. "Good work, that. I won't forget it. You were the volunteer aid and scout from Seymour's column, weren't you?"

"Yes, major," Ned replied, saluting.

"Well, lad, I'm going to send you back to Seymour," said the major. "He's where you left him, I reckon, near the north arsenal, and he's just heliographed that his position is desperate and that he can't hold out over two days. I want him to know that the relief is on its way and will help him out, God willing, before another day's sun sets. Will you tell him so?"

"Yes, major," was Ned's answer.

"You will start right off," the major ordered. "Colonel Schivinsky and his Russians will go forward at once, and a second allied detachment will follow him. But you can get in with word of relief ahead of the columns if you can slip through."

"Ay, ay, sir," Ned replied. "Will my trophy and my prisoner be cared for until I join the force again?"

"Trophy? O, the banner? Certainly, lad," the major replied, "and duly credited. But the prisoner —what prisoner?"

Ned pointed to the German drill master at his side.

"This man, major," he said. "He was an impressed drill master fighting in the Boxer ranks—

but under protest. He surrendered to me and I took his parole."

"A parole—from a renegade cut-throat?" cried the major. "That is outside the law, lad. There is no mercy shown to renegade white men fighting in these bloody Boxer ranks against their own. Turn him over to the provost. We'll deal with him later."

"But, major, my word? I have given it, sir," Ned protested. "And there is no wrong in the man. He was forced in and he fought well by my side after I took his word. Don't let me break promise with him, major. See, I'll be responsible for him. Let him come with me."

Major Waller exchanged looks with Commander Cradock. The Englishman nodded.

"Let's trust him to the young 'un, major," said the commander. "I'd take the lad's promise and the turn-coat is fairly his spoil. I don't take to these fellows either, but we don't want to judge unheard. Make your American boy responsible for him and, on his report, we can deal with the renegade later. Things are not always as black as they seem to be, you know."

"As you say, commander," the major assented. "You're responsible for your prisoner, Pevear. Will you leave him with us?"

"Never, never," whispered Ned's prisoner. "Take

me with you, my friend. See, I can help you through, perhaps."

Ned looked the German "Boxer" fairly in the eye. Then he laid a hand on his arm.

"I think I'll take him with me, major, if you don't object," he said. "It's safer, so, and—he'll be among friends."

"Friends!" cried Tom Dickson. "Yes—his Boxers. Don't you trust him, Ned. Friends, indeed! Fancy!"

"No, Tom," returned Ned with a smile, "he'll be with me. I'm all the friends he's got just now, it seems, and I'll trust him."

"Then, hanged if I don't go with you to watch your friend," cried Tom. "Have I your permission, Commander Cradock?"

"You have mine, sir, if you have that of the young American—your friend, eh?" the commander replied,

"Too good a friend to lose, sir," replied Tom. "How is it, Ned—can I ride with you?"

"Can you? Well, I should smile, Tom!" cried the American. "I wouldn't like anything better. Two's company, you know."

"Hm, yes," said Tom, with a glance of suspicion toward "the reformed Boxer," as he called Ned's prisoner, "and three's a crowd."

"Well, don't crowd him too much, lad; give the

fellow a show," retorted Ned and with the English lad, half puzzled over the American's joke, the "griffins" were requisitioned at once and before half an hour had passed the three oddly assorted comrades were riding out of the Taku gate, and, skirting the native city, followed the river road toward the camp of the beleaguered Seymour, ten miles to the north east.

They rode rapidly as they were able; but they galloped cautiously, too, and away from the hostile groups of Chinese who filled the outlying villages with their illy disciplined troops and long handled banners. And as they rode the reclaimed German gave them information and suggestions that seemed so valuable that even Tom's suspicions were somewhat allayed.

"My name is Ullman," said he, "Captain Carl Ullman of the German army. I was two years resident instructor in an English academy, and for two years I have had the appointment of drill master in the Chinese service. I was in the north when this trouble broke out, and my only hope of life was to serve in the Boxer ranks, trusting to the chance to escape when I was near the armies of civilization. But I could not desert. That is disgrace. I fought only in seeming, and behold!—I am prisoner in fair fight. The conscience is clear, my friends. Now, these Chinamen are my foes; and, look you! they

are foes to civilization. *Ach,* this China! it is a land devoured by secret societies; and each would have the mastery while all are slaves to orders and superstitions."

"Even the government?" queried Tom.

"*Ach!* the government," cried Captain Ullman. "What is the government? It is the worst of all. The prince Tuan who is now in power he is the creature of what you call the Boxers—the bloodiest of all these secret societies. His word is law; that word is death to the foreigners, and, presto! they die."

"What! the ministers in Pekin? Massacred, do you mean?" cried Tom. "They never would dare."

"Dare! when the secret societies and the chief officials say yes? You do not know these Chinese, my friend," said the German. "Hear you. Let me tell you what I have heard this day from Pekin. Not a foreigner is to be left alive. Orders have gone to escort them all to Tien Tsin under guard. And under guard of whom? The Imperial troops—Boxers in disguise. Hear me! Not one of those foreigners—ambassadors, missionaries, merchants—man, woman or child—will ever get five miles from Pekin alive. They were to leave to-day. Himmel! it is sad; they are all dead now."

Ned gave his griffin a resounding thwack.

"Horrible! and we ride mooning along here," he said. "Ride for your life, Tom. I'll get through to the admiral at once and if he don't fight his way back to save the refugees or hamstring those treacherous Chinks, then I'll turn pagan and run a pagoda. Get on, Jehoshaphat! we've no time to lose," and again he thwacked his sturdy griffin.

"No, but we have our lives to lose, my young friend," said the German. "And of what use may we be to the Admiral Seymour or the refugees without lives to help them. Ride cautious, I pray. See! behold now; beyond there. It is a host, eh? It is reinforcements for the Boxers at Tien Tsin. See; they swarm at the railway station; look you, they are to left and to right. We must use strategy my friends, or we ride no further in freedom. Stay you here until I meet them."

"And give us over as prisoners, eh? Not if I can stop you," cried Tom, all his suspicions returning as he forced his pony in front of Ullman to turn him back.

But Ned interfered.

"What's the use, Tom," he said; "Doubting is no good, and interference won't help us. Give the cap'n a show. I'm taking stock in him, I am. We've got to get through or by those chaps, and I'll trust to him. He knows these Chinks better than we do. I'll risk it; go ahead, cap. We'll wait for you."

Tom dropped beside his friend grumbling, and the German rode ahead toward the advancing mass of Boxers that had so suddenly confronted them.

Ullman sprang from his horse and deliberately rolled up his right trousers leg, and holding his right hand above his head with three fingers spread out he advanced to meet the Boxers; then, laying his left hand on his breast, the thumb and forefinger bent and the other fingers shut, he turned the palm of his right hand inward and stood still, waiting.

A half dozen men sprang from the Boxer ranks and came toward the German with inquiring signs. Now right hand and now left hand played their part in all manner of crooks and bends and fingerings, until Ned decided it was a deaf-mute conversation. But suddenly a shrill cry of inquiry came straight at the German from one of the Boxer advance.

With an equally shrill Chinese "Yes," Captain Ullman held up his left hand with the thumb nail pressed against the second finger, whereupon the Boxers flung out their hands as if in welcome and the German turned to his younger comrades with a nod of re-assurance.

There came fresh questionings in Chinese which Tom could not understand; then, suddenly, they saw a Boxer catch the German by his military jacket and call out shrilly to his friends.

A roar as of distrust broke from the encompassing

throng, which Captain Ullman tried to allay, but seemingly to no purpose, for, suddenly he wheeled about and striding toward the two boys he shouted to them, "Turn and ride back for your lives, friends! I will hold them in parley. *Ach, himmel!* I was right save in one little thing. I forgot to let down one corner of my jacket. Ride for your lives. Regard me not."

Even before he had concluded, the two lads had wheeled their griffins about and were galloping for dear life to Tien Tsin; and still, as they rode, they could hear above the shrill cries of the Boxers the deeper tones of the German drill master, bidding them spur and ride.

"It's no use, Ned," said Tom. "They'll get us before we can make the town. Hang your Dutchman! I'll wager we could have got along better without him and his bloomin' sign-language."

"We can take to the river if we get blown, Tom," said Ned; "but don't try it until we have to."

He looked around swiftly.

"They're after us; but we've got the lead on 'em," he said. "If these little beasts don't take it into their heads to throw us or lie down under us we may—"

"Hello!" Tom gave a cry of mingled hope and fear. "Look there, Ned. What's yonder, ahead of us?"

The two lads were galloping for dear life.

Both boys peered into the distance ahead as they galloped on. A cloud of dust and a mass of horsemen appeared in the south, bearing down on them.

"No use, lad; it's all up with us now, I fancy," said Tom. "It's another batch of Boxers. We're surrounded."

"They don't ride like Boxers, Tom," said Ned, shading his eyes with his hand and flinging his glance as far ahead as possible. "Look at that. No Chinaman ever gets that gallop and swing. And see, Tom; see, they're carrying spears or lances. Hey, lad, go for 'em! We're all right. It's the Cossack Cavalry, heading the relief for Seymour. Spur on and tell 'em what's in the path."

Ned's report was correct. The riders were neither Boxers nor Imperial troops. They were the advance of Schivinsky's relief pushing on to the aid of Seymour.

The lads rode on and hailing the galloping advance reported the obstacle in the path.

"Thousands you say, little brother?" queried the Russian major who led the advance, "and how many thousands, now?"

Ned had the eyes of a scout and the head of a good judge of numbers.

"Oh, twelve or fifteen thousand at the least," he replied. "They are massed about the old railway

station, and they have captured our interpreter. What will you do?"

"Do? Why, there is but one thing to do, friend," said the major. "We go ahead as ordered."

"Good for you!" cried both the boys with enthusiasm.

"It'll be a bit tropical, I fancy," said Tom; "but Seymour's got to be saved; and we don't mind a little heat. Do we charge through 'em, sir?"

"Charge and scatter," the Russian replied. "Do you ride with us, gentlemen?"

"Every time," replied Ned, "eh, Tom?" And Tom nodded his head vigorously.

"Right you are, Ned," he agreed. "We ride wherever the advance goes, don't you know."

There came a sharp, quick guttural command; the compact line of cavalrymen, only seven hundred in all, thundered along the horrible Pekin road; then as, ahead not three hundred yards, the mass of defiant Boxers, seventeen thousand at least, held the wrecked railway and the river road, again the sharp command rolled out, and the seven hundred deploying into a thin, extended line, with brandished whips and curdling Cossack yells, dashed at a mad gallop straight upon the hesitating Chinese mass.

For an instant hesitation seemed ready to stiffen into decision and action. The thousands wavered about their tossing standards, and then with every

warlike instrument from pitchfork to Mauser brandished in air, the Boxers came on as if to engulf and overthrow that thin Cossack line by mere strength of numbers. Gongs clashed and drums boomed while, from the open flanks, the field cannon, dragged into action, essayed to play upon the brave seven hundred.

But the seven hundred had what the seventeen thousand lacked—discipline, concentration and obedience to orders.

The yells grew in force and volume; the major in command, with reassuring and invigorating words charged with his men, and both Ned Pevear and Tom Dickson felt the blood tingle in every vein and confidence strengthen in every nerve as they too galloped on with that thin, unswerving, insistent line of gray.

Then,—Ned never could tell just how it came about,—they were in the thick of it, almost in an instant. The Cossack whips, as much an implement of war as sword and gun, cracked above the heads of the dashing ponies as in solid front the extended line struck the Chinese mass, struck it, wound around it like some monster snake, broke through it, compressed and expanded again and sent the seventeen thousand scattering in wild flight before these "mad savages of the North," as China voted the Cossacks to be.

Then they slackened speed, whirled about at the word of command and with ready rifles "plunked" a swift shower of lead into the broken Boxer horde and still further scattered and demoralized the surprised and flying enemy. It was a victory of discipline—seven hundred against a host. And Ned and Tom were part of it all. They were simply radiant with enthusiasm, as, flushed with the excitement of triumph, they rallied to the bugle call which once again sent the deployed ranks of the Cossacks into a solid column and set the advance forward on their mission of relief.

"Great work that, major," said Ned as they ranged beside the Russian officer with their hearty congratulations.

"I told you it would be a bit tropical," said Tom, "but, my hat! what a ride it was. I wouldn't have missed it for a farm."

"It is the discipline, the strength of faith in the code, gentlemen," the Russian replied. "My children here are ever to be relied upon, and our allies—" here he bowed courteously to the English and American lads—"they were magnificent, believe me."

The boys saluted in acknowledgment of the Russian's compliment, and then suddenly Ned bethought himself of the German captain.

"I wonder what has become of our friend, Tom," he said.

"What! the sign-talker?" queried Tom. "Gone to join his brothers of the pig-tails, I fancy. I wonder now whether—"

But Ned stopped his query with a cry of recognition and alarm. For, even as he spoke, there rode up to the major in command, two Cossacks dragging between them the figure of the German captain, limp, dishevelled and half-spent.

A word passed between soldiers and officers. Then the major spoke in English out of regard for his guests.

"See, gentlemen, a renegade among the pagans; a white man in their ranks," he said. "Now shall you see Russian justice, sharp and swift. Tch!" and he raised his heavy cavalry sword.

But Ned caught his arm.

"No, sir! You shall not! he is my prisoner," cried the American. "In the name of the United States I demand his life and his release."

CHAPTER V

A GARRISON OF TWO

THE major of the Cossacks flung a laugh and a glance at the imperious young American; then as he saw that the lad was in earnest, he slowly lowered the lifted sword while his eye grew dark and his voice stern.

"What is it, little brother?" he said. "You would stop the course of righteous vengeance? It is such as these that spoil the earth for gentlemen. The traitor must die."

"He must not, sir," the American replied. "I know him," and again he briefly told the German's story.

The major shook his head; but he put up his sword, and released his hold on the prisoner.

"One who can train Chinamen to fight no better than yon coward host," he said with a contemptuous toss of his head toward the fleeing Boxers, "does not even deserve decapitation. "I—I trust him not. But see—he is yours, little brother—if once your captain has turned him over to you. See, again you are responsible for him. But—he was of

no avail to you when he met the Boxers. What will you with him? He looks in no condition to gallop with our riders. Will you leave him for his society friends the Boxers?"

"He shall have my pony until he gains strength or until I can find another," and the lad, actually hoisted the half conscious man to the back of his own stout little "griffin."

This was too much for Tom.

"I don't know whether I believe in this chap or not, Ned," he said, "but hang me, if you're going to do all the Samaritan act. I can take a share in it too, I fancy. Here, let me have the cap'n. I'll hold him on in front of me awhile and we'll spell things a bit."

The major of Cossacks laughed.

"No need of that, gentlemen, while I'm in command here," he said. "You, as I understand it have a mission upon which you ride. You cannot be encumbered with wounded men or any burden. Leave your charge with me. I promise to hand him over to you in good condition when we meet again. Do you gallop on as your orders run and bear the news of our coming to the Admiral Seymour. No," as Ned hesitated, "have no fear. I will care for your 'responsibility' as if it were mine own. It is mine—for I accept it. Ride on, allies!"

And with a wave of the hand the Russian sped the

two lads on their mission while a great Cossack lifted the wounded German to the saddle before him and then the advance went forward.

But Ned and Tom spurred over the great plain, now free from Boxers and Chinese soldiers after the Russian charge, and halted not until far ahead they spied floating above the Imperial arsenal held by Seymour's beleaguered troops, the allied flags that still told of occupation, safety and defiance.

There was need for a stout show of that same defiance. All around the captured arsenal swarmed and whanged the besieging Chinese hordes—fanatics, Boxers and Imperial troops, bent on the overthrow and destruction of the foreign devils caged at last in the arsenal they had dared to steal from the Son of Heaven.

The two lads halted, as from a slight rise they saw the problem before them.

"Can't ride through that, eh Tom?" demanded Ned, sweeping plain and river with his eye, seeking some unguarded point where a boy on a pony might slip unnoticed through.

"It don't look it, my son," Tom Dickson answered. "But we've got to do it."

"Yes, or get word to the admiral in some other way," Ned said, racking his brains for some way out.

Suddenly Tom seized his arm.

"My hat! Ned; I've got it," he cried. "Can you wig-wag?"

"Do I know the code, d'ye mean?" queried Ned. "I know what we use on shipboard; but what good'll that do? It may not be the allied code, and then where'll we wig-wag from. There's no hill or high place here that our folks can see us from unless we climb up—Great Scott!" he broke off with sudden exclamation, "What's the matter with that pagoda, Tom? If we can get up to the top we can work a saddle cloth for all we're worth and perhaps some of McCalla's marines will catch sight of it and know what we're at. How does the pagoda strike you?"

"It's immense, Ned," Tom declared, adding, cautiously, "if somebody don't strike us before we get a chance at it. A pagoda! Why, that's No Thoroughfare to foreign devils, Ned. It's taboo to us."

"'Private way, dangerous passing,' as they say in Boston, eh?" said Ned. "Well, I've driven up these No Thoroughfares before. I'll try it if you'll brace me up, old chap."

As if that "if" were needed! Young England was ready to second young America every time, and Tom was quick to say as much. So, without further delay, they made their way to what Ned called the pagoda but what was really not a pagoda but one of the three-tiered, curved-roofed "paper burning"

temples that one sees scattered over the Chinese land where the streaming paper prayers, run off from the prayer wheel are burned as incense to the purchasable Joss or God of the Chinese.

The little gate to the temple seemed deserted as the boys led their ponies within the small enclosure and proceeded to strip off the saddle cloth from Ned's griffin. A long banner staff, accidentally discarded by some hurrying bannerman lay upon the ground and while Ned proceeded to bind his saddle cloth to the staff Tom started on an exploring expedition.

"The place is empty, Ned," the English lad called back from the doorway of the temple. "If we can only force this door open we can—hello! there she goes. Well! of all the—"

"Wow-wow-wow!" came the sharp bark of a dog, so closely at Ned's throat that involuntarily the lad leaped back.

"It's gone to the dogs, like so many other things in China," Tom said, with the short laugh of mingled surprise and contempt. Then he investigated.

"It's one of those Thibetan curs," he said; "they keep 'em chained in some of these places, so I hear, to ward off unfriendly spirits. Well, I'm afraid we come under that head just now, eh, Ned. I hope he hasn't roused the neighborhood. He will if we don't put a stop to him. Sorry to do it, old fellow,

but really the fate of an army depends on your keeping quiet just now, and there's only one way to fix you."

The revolver spoke out sharp and insistently—once—twice—and the guardian of the temple barked no more.

"All ready, Tom," Ned announced from his knees. "I've got this wig-wag fixed all right. Now then to try it. Will you stay here and guard the gate—or how?"

"I fancy I'd better, Ned," the English lad replied. "Some of those recreants may be coming back and some one must look out for them. See here, I'm going to barricade things, so as to be on the safe side—inside—and give you a chance. Phew! I have struck cleaner places. Tell you what, Ned, I've come to the conclusion that the god of China is the god of dirt, and these temples are his chief shrines, eh."

Ned helped his friend to close and barricade the outer door of the small temple enclosure, both lads wondering why the place was so silent and empty of man, for in swarming China few vacant spots are found. But the American had work to do, and was soon feeling his way up toward the beautifully curved roof which, gilded, tiled and decorated, surmounted the little temple.

The way was dark and dirty, the short stone steps encumbered with rubbish and filth, but Ned pushed

his way up as the light coming in through the narrow slits in the wall now and then helped him on. With the banner staff bumping behind him and his pistol ready for emergencies the boy felt his way up from one floor to the other and when he reached what he supposed to be the upper story he looked about for some way of egress to the roof.

At first there seemed none. But upon investigation, Ned, with the help of a match and a swinging torch of prayer papers discovered what looked like a door or screen against the wall. He inserted the end of his banner pole beneath it and slowly pried it open. It covered a wider window than the ones below stairs, and the American cautiously thrust out his head.

He looked down upon the customary view of the Pei-ho region—a low flat country, the muddy river winding over the plain, mud banks, sand hills, sorghum fields, a few trees, fences bright with climbing flowers, mud roofs to mud houses; behind him were the dim outskirts of Tien-Tsin, before him the walls of the beleaguered arsenal and the moving masses of Chinese besiegers, scarcely a half mile away.

Cautiously Ned Pevear thrust himself through the opening. Then, steadying himself with his banner pole and thrusting his pistol into his belt he raised himself until he clutched the curved eaves of the

temple and with a little spring caught the gracefully turned corner ornament modelled, so say the students of Chinese architecture either upon the upturning boughs of the forest tree or the Tartar tent-tops of by-gone times.

Whatever the curving corner of the roof was modelled upon it served Ned's purpose. For, with a mighty twist and jump, the athletic young American swung himself free of the window sill and up until he had flung a leg over the curved corner. The next instant he stood just where he wished to be—alone on the temple roof, with the far stretching landscape below him and, in plain view, the beleaguered Imperial arsenal from which streamed the fluttering allied flags.

The distant sound of sniping guns and booming cannon came to his ears from the camp of the besiegers; then he heard below him the sound of blows upon the barricaded door and he knew that the careless guardians of the temple had returned and were demanding admission.

"Hullo! Tom's discovered," he said. "You've got to hustle, Ned, my son, if you want to get in your fine work."

He braced himself against the central ornament that topped the sloping, pagoda-like roof and recalling his lessons in signalling, learned in the service on

Luzon scouting expeditions and Transvaal battle-fields he wig-wagged his improvised signal-flag in vigorous but amateurish fashion.

Now this way and now that, up and down, across and round about he worked his saddle cloth flag.

"Relief-in-sight. Hold-on!" he spelled out, not quite sure that his code was correct, but very hopeful that it might be. And all the time he strained his eyes toward the distant walls of the armory topped with the allied flags.

There came no answering sign or signal. Instead, there fell upon his ears the sound of redoubling blows upon the door to the temple enclosure and below his feet the hoarse murmur of a gathering throng that soon swelled into a shout.

Ned knew now that he too had been discovered, and that he and Tom Dickson were beleaguered and besieged quite as much as was Seymour's caged army within the Imperial arsenal. But still he held bravely to his work. Up and down, this way and that, he worked his signalling wig-wag, spelling over the same refrain of good tidings: "Relief-in-sight. Hold-on!"

He would scarcely trust himself to look below. His duty was to attract the attention of the distant arsenal. Oh! could he not do so? Just once, he said, let them see and answer me, just once, and then—

Then!—the then had come almost sooner than he feared. Around the enclosure leaped and danced an excited, shrieking, ever-growing throng. Then, with a ping and a spat, bullets nipped and tore the sloping roof; arrows from Boxer bows sang hissing past him or fell with a thud at his feet. One tore his spattees with a rip; a bullet cut its way through his swaying signal-flag; another struck the canteen swinging at his side; another—hullo! what was that?

A bright light struck him full in the face; another almost blinded his eyes an instant so that he raised a hand to ward off the glare; a third gleamed a second on the long gilded staff of his signal flag; he threw a hasty glance at the arsenal walls; no signal flag fluttered out, but, with a great joy Ned Pevear caught the repeated flash and gleam of something on the sun-lit wall and the meaning of it all came to him at once.

"Hurrah! they've seen me," he cried; "they're heliographing a reply."

He did not know what it was. He was not versed in heliographic talk; but he knew that his mission was accomplished and that his message of relief had been read on the armory walls.

"All-right! We-are-coming. Hold-on!" he wig-wagged back. "All-right! We-are-com—"

Spat! crack! a bullet struck his gilded banner

staff fair and square in the butt just above his hand. The staff swayed, split and fell to the roof; the splinters tore into his hand as the stick fell at his feet. But with a last desperate clutch, Ned grabbed at the falling staff, swung it in triumph vigorously about his head, and tearing off the saddle cloth, launched the broken staff straight at the upturned faces of the besiegers who howled at his feet. Then, sliding from the roof, he swung himself from the curved corner points into the open window and clattered down the darkened stone staircase, binding up his bleeding hand as he ran.

"Tom! Tom!" he shouted, "they saw me. It's all right, old chap, they saw my signal at the arsenal. Hooray for us! How goes it with you?"

"Right as a trivet, dear boy," the cheery answer came up from the darkness below. "I'm standing these chappies off in great shape. But I think they've been plunking you instead of me, lately. How are you—safe and sound?"

"Safe, but not just sound," Ned replied as he dropped by his friend's side. "Got my hand smashed; but I reckon I can dig the splinters out. They can wait, anyhow. What's for us to do?"

"Hold the fort, I fancy," the English lad replied. "That's all there is to do. My hat! we've got to. What ammunition have you got?"

"A few charges left, enough for a little revolver

sniping," Ned replied. "Have you fired yours all off?"

"Not if the court knows herself, lad," said Tom. "I'm holding back for emergencies. When that outer gate comes down then it's our play. They've been divided, I fancy, between you on the roof and me down here and they don't really know how many of us are in here. Can't we try a bluff on 'em and make 'em think we're an army?"

"Sure," replied Ned, entering into the spirit of the thing. "Get out into the courtyard, Tom. Now tramp, tramp, make all the drill noise you can." Then he shouted:

"Attention! Forward by files! right dress! Company—halt! Ground arms!"

Tramp! tramp! about the enclosure, the boys marched with as much noise as possible, and a regular string of military commands that would have demoralized a regiment and upset a battalion.

As Tom declared, they were doubtless "all Greek to the Chinks," but they had the desired effect.

There came a cessation of the shouts and shrieks of the encompassing throng. The words from within were unintelligible to those without; but every nation knows the voice of command. The mob believed, as Ned desired, that a garrison of foreign soldiers had, by some stratagem, been thrown into the temple enclosure.

Then Tom, forcing aside the barricade, fearlessly flung open the door, and with Ned beside him, flaunting a handkerchief from a short stick as a flag of truce, fearlessly faced the mob.

The young Englishman's face was stern and determined; his pistol gleamed in his hand. The yell of surprise that greeted him and his truce bearer, died suddenly away as he raised his hand.

"Who speaks English here?" he demanded.

A chorus of Chinese jargon answered him; hands and heads were flung and shaken in shrill query. But out of it all came a sentence in pidgin English that both boys knew and a stout, comfortable-looking Chinaman was thrust to the front by his comrades.

"I know the English," so the "pidgin" ran. "I am a comprador in the English Concession at Tien Tsin. What would the honorable one say?"

"Ah ha! You are a comprador, eh?" said Tom. "Well, then, my man,—you know when the English say a thing they mean it. Hear me! Within this enclosure we have an allied force of English and American. We are the advance of the great army sent forward from Tien Tsin. Your forts at Taku are ours; your walls at Tien Tsin are ours; disperse, begone, or the allied army now on its way hither will wipe you from the earth. Give us peaceable possession here, or our great army will swallow

you. Bid your hosts depart from the arsenal yonder and let our army within its walls go back to Tien Tsin and we will not molest you. Refuse, and our riflemen within will plant the cannon on the roof of your temple, destroy your village and open the way for our army of vengeance. What say your people in reply?"

The comprador may not have comprehended all of Tom's speech, but, as Ned declared, "he seemed to get its drift." He turned about and addressed the mob.

There was much tossing of spears and shrieking of questions and wagging of heads. Then from the throng came two in the odd native uniform of Chinese Imperial officers, with others whom the boys knew as Boxers by their fantastic rig.

These fired at the comprador who was to act as interpreter a storm of inquiries. The portly man from the Concession finally confronted the "Commander" and his truce bearer.

"My honorable brothers demand of the foreign gentlemen" he explained, "that they be permitted to enter within the temple precincts and see for themselves the army you command. Then shall an equal number of our valiant ones be counted off, and here, on the roadway, will the two equal forces fight for the mastery. If our honorable visitors shall conquer we will give you the way; if not, you shall yield

to us, and shall bid your army from Tien Tsin retire from the land."

Tom Dickson cast at the throng, which shouted its approval of this proposition, a defiant and very superior smile.

"It is not the custom of the Europeans—and the Americans," he added, "to settle disputes thus. We are here for a purpose. Our emperors and great ones—our Yamen and councillors—demand for their troops a free passage through your land of China to join our brothers in yonder arsenal and in distant Pekin. We make no terms. We simply say we go forward. Resist us and it will be death to you. Give us passage and we will not molest you. Retire and let the advance I here command garrison without molestation this building we have captured by our might and our great army when it joins me will not trouble you. But see that we are not disturbed now, or it will be worse for you."

The comprador cast open hands toward the defiant "garrison."

"It is not wise, it is not wise, O valiant young foreigners," he said. "I know your strength, but I know ours, too. We are as the sands of the desert in numbers. Be not rash."

"You heard my words, most worthy comprador," said Tom sternly. "Your answer?"

The answer came swiftly. For as the comprador announced to his brethren the "commander's" ulti-

matum, a great cry of refusal and rage burst from the throng. The swaying mass, pressed forward by those in the rear, almost overcame the conservative comprador who was counselling peace and concession, and a yell that was not to be mistaken came as the Boxers' refusal.

"In, in, worthy ones; they will not respect your white flag," the comprador cried, and Tom and Ned had but scant time to dart back and barricade still more strongly the closed door to the temple enclosure, before the demand for attack and destruction rose into an impelling shout.

Ned looked at Tom shrewdly.

"I reckon we're in for it, commander," he said. "Do you think you handled that thing just right?"

"Hobson's choice, my boy," the English lad replied. "If we've got to go we can keep a stiff upper lip all the way, don't you know."

Ned nodded in approval. He was no craven and could carry a bluff as boldly as any one, when occasion demanded.

The occasion just now certainly demanded something "strenuous," for with a battering of logs and stones against the temple entrance, the gate shook on its stout hinges and as the boys with a volley from their pistols leaped back into the temple the gate of the compound fell with a crash and the Boxers swarmed into the enclosure.

CHAPTER VI

A RASH RESOLVE

THE allies braced and barricaded the door to the temple itself, taking advantage of the temporary surprise of the invading Boxers who, looking for an army, found—nothing!

"Ned," said Tom as, ascending to the upper story, the two lads trained their loaded pistols on the crowd below, "perhaps you think I'm a fool for sticking to my bluff as I did, but I fancy I'm all right. Listen! what do you hear?"

Ned heard nothing, for the besiegers below broke into thin shrill shrieks of demand and bravado. But there was a lull for an instant, and then he heard something—the clear call of the bugle sounding in the distance.

"It's the Cossacks!" he cried. "Tom, you're a brick."

"O, dinna ye hear the slogan?" cried Tom. "I did, and I'd figured that the major's rough riders of the Steppes were due here about now. That's why my lip stiffened."

"God grant they get here before we're smoked out," cried Ned fervently.

"They've got to, lad," replied Tom. "To the roof, to the roof with you. We'll get 'em here in double quick time, trust me."

Ned did trust him. He was beginning to have great faith in Tom Dickson's "strategy."

The "strategy" certainly worked. Scarcely had the lads swung themselves by the curved corners of the eaves up to the roof of the temple from which vantage ground they proceeded to "snipe" the besiegers below than the clear notes of the cavalry bugle rang out again, nearer and yet nearer to them. Then, with a shout, the Cossack horsemen charged full against the Boxer leaguers and with shot and whip scattered them like chaff, while above, on the roof of the "paper-burning temple" the garrison of two hailed their deliverers with shouts and cheers of welcome and fired their last cartridges at the vanishing besiegers.

Then they clambered down and reported.

"You have done well, little brothers," the Russian major said. "Through yonder mass of pagans it would have been madness for you to try and force your way. And you have communicated with the Admiral Seymour? It is well. Now that he knows the relief is at hand he can hold out with more assurance. My Colonel Schivinsky should be

not far behind. We will hold our advance here and await his coming."

The Cossack advance bivouacked in and about the captured temple, strengthening that outpost and cautiously guarding the vantage ground they were to hold until the main column of the relief came up.

Ned's first care was for his prisoner. The Russian major had kept his promise and Captain Ullman had been so well cared for that he had revived sufficiently to be able to converse with his young protector. His rough handling by the Boxers he had undertaken to propitiate had only temporarily disabled him and he was emphatic in his assurances to Ned and Tom that he was anxious to prove the faith that was in him.

"It was an unwise thing to send so small a force as your English admiral led to the relief of Pekin," he declared; "it was a foolish thing to bombard the forts at Taku. China rouses but slowly, but when such moves are made by the foreigners, Mongol and Manchurian alike think their homeland is invaded and they rise to drive out the invaders. For this outbreak in China began not as an attack on foreigners but as a rebellion of the Chinese against the hated Manchu dynasty; it was to be China for the Chinese, and the attack on the foreigners was simply because their presence in China—the merchants and the missionaries—was by favor of the ruling dy-

nasty. I know that the Boxers, who are but a section of the great Triad society, seek to restore the old Chinese dynasty, drive out the Manchus and foreigners and let the real Chinese govern themselves. Had your fighting men and councillors but understood this all the trouble and massacre at Pekin might have been avoided."

"Then it is massacre there, you think?" Ned queried.

"Think? I know," the drill captain replied. "Said I not what I had heard through secret tidings from Pekin? It is true even now that the German minister, the baron von Ketteler, has been slain in the streets of Pekin while on his way to the yamen to protest against the removal of the ministers to Tien Tsin. If they have gone thither they have been murdered by their escort even as he was killed; if they have not left then they have been besieged and slain within their legation walls."

"By heaven! then we will avenge them," cried Tom Dickson hotly. "Do you suppose the British government will stand calmly by and see her ministers and subjects slaughtered. Down with these treacherous Chinks, say I, and cut up their worthless Empire. My hat! but I'll get into Pekin now if forty million bar the way. I've just got to, Ned. What will Sir Robert Hart say, if I don't show up when I promised."

L. of C.

"Sir Robert Hart?" exclaimed Ned. "If the rest of the foreigners are killed, I reckon he is, too."

"Bosh! how could he be?" cried Tom. "They'd as soon kill their Emperor."

"Perhaps they have," Ullman said. "There are plots within plots in yonder Forbidden City."

"Br-r-r! what a place to live in," said Ned. "It's worse than Manila. Give me a Christian land, every time," he added. "I like to know when and where a fellow is going to hit if I've got to stand on guard. But it's useless to talk of your getting through to Pekin, Tom. How are you going to do that, with all North China up in arms? You're a bright young chap, my lad, but your strategy won't avail you there."

"Perhaps mine could," the German said quietly.

"Yours!" exclaimed both the lads in chorus. "What do you mean, Cap'n?"

"Any more deaf-mute business?" demanded Tom. "Because if that's in your mind I'm afraid it won't work. We'd be done for before we started."

"Will my young friends let me think out a plan?" Captain Ullman queried. "I must do something. I am looked on with distrust and suspicion here and in the allied camp. But I'm true; and if my English friend will believe in me I'll promise to get him through to Pekin without harm or loss."

Ned shook his head judicially while Tom fingered his chin skeptically.

"I don't see how, Cap'n," was Ned's comment. "But wait until Seymour's relieved. Then we'll talk about it."

Seymour's relief was not far distant. That very day the main column of the allied re-enforcements, two thousand strong, joined the advance at the embattled temple and early next morning the struggle for the relief began.

It was anything but "blue Monday" to Admiral Seymour and his beleaguered garrison when the allied flags were soon charging to his rescue. Two hundred and more of his crippled force lay sorely wounded within the captured arsenal; sixty-two had fallen in the continual fighting with the Boxer hosts. But the remnant sprang to their work with a cheer as the relief came on; the captured cannon on the wall boomed out in a shotted salute that hailed the re-enforcements and ploughed into the besiegers. Then the gates of the arsenal were flung open and as the two thousand allies from Tien Tsin drove the Boxer hosts before them, the men of eight nations, cooped up in the arsenal they had held so valiantly against tremendous odds, streamed out in final sortie against the demoralized Chinese and sent them flying from the field.

Then, sick and wounded, well and weak, greeted with smiles and cheers and hand clasps their brother allies who had come to their relief and that very day rescuers and rescued moved back to safety within the defences of Tien Tsin.

But safety there soon became a matter of uncertainty. Infuriated by the escape of Seymour, enraged by the presence of Europeans in Tien Tsin and roused to fury by the stream of foreign invasion that came into the muddy Pei-ho at Taku and landed the allied hosts for the degradation of China, the Imperial troops and the Boxers joined forces to repel the invaders and poured their masses of disciplined and undisciplined fighting men into the field of war, until it was estimated that at least sixty thousand Imperial soldiers and an uncounted host of Boxers had gathered for the defence of Pekin while fully twenty thousand soldiers and as many "Boxers" crowded after the retreating "relievers" to the investment of Tien Tsin.

"You'll need all the re-enforcements you can get to face an aroused China," Captain Ullman declared, as he sat in quarters with the boys; "I know of what I am talking, my dear friends, for I have drilled these Chinks, as you call them, and I can tell you their number and their armament are not to be despised by the generals of the Powers. A half million can rally for the defence of Pekin."

"A mob, though," declared Tom.

"Mob? Not so, not so," the German replied. "Some of them—perhaps most of them—three-fourths we will say—are poorly drilled, poorly armed and not to be depended upon, but the rest—a hundred and fifty thousand, at least, have been drilled into excellence by drill masters like myself; while as to their armament—look you, I know what they have for that disciplined force: two hundred and twenty Cruesot guns, eighteen Krupps and one hundred and fifty Maxims. This I know, for I have checked them off as they came to us from the German gun making firms in Carlowitz."

"German drill masters and German guns!" exclaimed Ned. "And now turned against civilization? Say, I shouldn't think you Germans would feel easy in your minds."

"And why not, friend," the captain replied. "We must live, we soldiers and tradesmen, and the Chinaman is a good paymaster. Business is business, as you would say in America."

"Well, our business is to get through to Pekin—or mine is," declared Tom impatiently. "And how am I going to get through that howling mob of Chinamen and those German guns that the captain tells of. I've just got to. Those are my orders."

"I had a plan, you know," the German observed.

"I know; so you said; what is it? Out with it.

I'm just eating my heart out, don't you know," said Tom, "mewed up here in this beastly Tien Tsin while Sir Robert Hart expects me at Pekin, and our legation there is in danger. What's your plan, Cap'n?"

The German paused an instant. Then he proceeded slowly:

"Mine English friend, Herr Tom," he said, "speaks the Chinese—well, as you say, after a fashion, as one who has learned it lightly; I speak it—as better, say you? Yes, so I think. See now. We become Chinese—in dress, in speech, in action. The Herr Tom, he is,—well, of the southern provinces, and his accent is not to be understood easily by these North China men. I am his comrade from the middle section. I speak it better. We go to be of service to our brothers the Boxers at Pekin. Hein! You trust the rest to me. We enter the Forbidden City unforbidden. Shall it be so?"

Tom's love of adventure caught at the scheme at once; so indeed did Ned's; but he was inclined to be skeptical.

"Sounds fine," he said, "but it's awfully risky. Why, man, you'd never get through alive. And where is the use of trying. But—see here—I'm not going to lose sight of you, Tom Dickson. If you go, so do I."

Tom grasped his friend's hand. But Captain Ullman raised a protesting finger.

"But why?" he said. "Look you here, my friend, my protector. You are needed here; you are pledged here; you are of the sea-soldiers—the marines, and cannot go. But as for us—Herr Tom and me—what are we? Not wanted here. He is of the civilians, without rank or duty, in the allied forces. And I—I, as you know, am without credit here, without friends, save only you. My record is questioned. I am not understood. I am half prisoner, holding my parole only at your pleasure. If I go I relieve you. I disembarrass you. It is better so; it is better for us both—for us all. Say I not truly, Herr Tom?"

Tom Dickson nodded.

"Right you are, Captain Ullman," he said. "I'm your man. Make me into a Chink as soon as you please. I trust you. I am for Pekin."

As for Ned he was but half convinced.

"It sounds all right, Cap'n," he admitted. "You lay it out well. And, as for yourself, I don't know but you are right. But Tom mustn't go. He may be killed."

"Well, it will be my funeral, old man, and not yours," the English boy replied with a laugh. "And who made you my keeper, I'd like to know?

As it looks to me you've got all you can do in this affair to watch out for number one. As for me—well, it won't be my first masquerade party. Didn't I tell you how I sneaked it half way across the Atlantic on Cervera's squadron with Don Martin, dressed half the time in the togs of a Spanish jackie? You know how I got through all right. What man has done man may do again, don't you know."

"He can try, I know. But, hanged if I like to have him," said Ned grudgingly.

There was much talk *pro* and *con,* but Ned found himself so completely in the minority and recognized so fully that Tom's will was unalterably bent upon the hazardous enterprise that, finally, he made a virtue of necessity and concluded to help rather than hinder the scheme.

"You may run the hundred-mile gauntlet from here to Pekin, my bully Boxer," he said to Tom, "but how in the dickens you're going to get inside the city and how you're going to step into the legation compound, is more than I can fathom."

"I fear me, my friend," Captain Ullman said, "that there is no legation compound left, or legationers either, if all the reports I hear are true. We shall simply remain Chinese until we have learned the truth and put ourselves in condition to report facts. I shall, myself, scarce dare to announce myself as German even if we may find Germans in Pe-

kin, but I have a good Dutch friend there, Mynheer Verbockhoven—"

Ned sprang to his feet, his eyes filled with surprise and inquiry.

"Who? Verbockhoven? Not of Manila?" he demanded.

Ullman looked at the lad curiously.

"Of Manila? Surely, yes," he replied. "And do you perhaps know the worthy Dutchman?"

"Know him?" cried Ned. "Well, I should smile! Know him—say, has he a daughter?"

"The yungvrouw Lizbet? Certain," the German replied.

"And they, too, are shut up in Pekin? Say, Tom Dickson," exclaimed the American lad, "you get right out of those Chinese togs and let me get into 'em. If the Verbockhovens are in danger in Pekin—especially the yungvrouw Lizbet—I'm going there instanter, if all the Boxers that ever boxed stand in my path with all their Righteous Fists unrighteously doubled. The Verbockhovens? Why, see here! they nursed me into strength when I lay wounded in Manila; I learned enough Dutch from the yungvrouw Lizbet to carry me through the Transvaal campaign, and they were my very good friends and helpers, I can tell you. If you think I'm going to desert them now, when they're in danger—why, you don't know Ned Pevear, that's all. Come

on, fix me up too, Cap'n. I'll be Ling Ching Foo or Li Hung Chang or any old Chinaman you can make me, but I'm with you, boys. It's 'on to Pekin!' I say—and the on-er the better."

The lad's outburst and sudden determination held his companions speechless with surprise an instant. Then, recovering voice, they united in protest and dissuasion.

"You can't, Ned. How can you?" cried Tom. "You're on duty here, and—"

"On duty? I'm semi-attached as a volunteer only," replied Ned. "I reckon I can be semi-detached if I want to. It's no use, I tell you. I'm going."

"But the language, the disguise, the actions?" exclaimed the German. "Ah, my friend, believe me, it is unwisdom; it is foolishness; it may be your death—and ours."

"Oh, I'll get along somehow; don't you worry about me," said optimistic Ned. "I reckon I've gone through enough with Filipinos and Boers and all that to be able to pull the wool over the eyes of these yellow-faced sons of the dragon. Besides, do you think I'm going to stay here and sit mum when pretty Lizbet Verbockhoven is in danger in Pekin? That's not my sort, I tell you. I'll save her if it costs my life."

"The talk is fine, it is brave, it is American," Cap-

tain Ullman exclaimed; "but it is foolhardy; it is unwise. How then, my friend, can you save the young girl there in Pekin? If not already massacred with the rest—"

"But who says they are massacred?" cried Ned? "And who believes it? I don't. I wouldn't believe one of these slant-eyed runners from up the river any more than I would a Shanghai despatch—and that's saying a good deal. And you can't tell me that five hundred allied blue jackets, with a lot of good fighting blood that must be in those legations, can't stand off all the yellow Chinks that ever banged a gong or shook a spear."

"That's all right, Ned. I hope so, too," said Tom Dickson. "But, hang it! those Chinks are there, and they're making things pretty lively for our folks, don't you know. Why, Sir Robert Hart's last word down the river was—and he's as close to the Chinamen as any foreigner can be—'The foreign colony is besieged in the Legations. Situation desperate. Come with all speed.' I know that, for I've got a copy of the despatch. Now Sir Robert is my chief. That despatch is a command for me; so I'm going in, whatever comes of it. And with all speed. But, with you, it's different. Your place is here. We'll try to get in to the legations with the latest word and you can just fight your way in with the relief—like a white man."

"*Ach,* so! Herr Tom is correct, my friend," said the German. "And, believe me, to fight your way in is to give you work in plenty. Hear me. I know this is so. Prince Tuan and his fighters—Boxers and Imperial troops—are crowding upon Tien Tsin here to keep you all from Pekin. It will not be a pleasure walk for you, nor the work of one day, this relief. Fortunate will you be, my friend, if you are not hemmed in here at Tien Tsin and forced to fight for your very lives, without even thinking of Pekin."

"And there you have it!" cried Ned. "Do you suppose I'm going to stay cooped up here in this mud hole of a town, when I can cut it and sneak into Pekin with you chaps. I'm going to try it, and that's all there is about it."

It was useless to combat Ned Pevear when once his mind was made up. His friends soon learned that fact. So they, at last, unwillingly gave in to his importunity and prepared for the "masquerade march" into Pekin.

Thus it came to pass that, early next morning, three Chinamen—an interpreter, a mandarin and a coolie, otherwise Tom Dickson, Captain Ullman and Ned Pevear—stole out of the foreign concession at Tien Tsin and skirting the walls of the native city, mingled with the ever-increasing force of the Chinese besiegers and were soon poling up the muddy

and winding Pei-ho in a native river boat manned by coolies.

But scarcely ten miles of the up-river trip through that Holland-like country of mud and water had been made when the boat came to a sudden stop. An edict had gone forth from some high official to confiscate all river boats, heading up-stream, for use as transports down to Tien Tsin, and not all the protests, pleas or bribery of the supposed Mandarin were of the slightest avail. The three passengers were forthwith dragged out by the Imperial river guard and their boat, filled up with troops and a modern field gun, turned about for the downward voyage.

Ullman persistently protested in his best Chinese; Tom was diplomatically silent; but Ned, enraged at this summary procedure and careless of consequences, expressed his opinion in vigorous American.

"Well, of all the high-handed ways of doing things, that takes the cake," he declared. "Great Scott! Cap'n, are you going to let these almond-eyed good for nothings play that sort of a game—"

The American lad got no further. Not even Ullman's stern Chinese rebuke of his coolie, nor Tom Dickson's vigorous punches to compel silence had stopped Ned's torrent of indignation. The sound of his voice and the nature of his speech

aroused first the suspicions and then the anger of the water guard.

"A foreign devil—an invader in disguise!—kill, kill, kill!" they shrieked in excited Chinese, and before the mandarin or the interpreter could interfere —before even they really knew what was happening, the protesting "coolie" was dragged from their side and whisked out of reach so swiftly and silently that neither Tom Dickson nor Captain Ullman knew of his whereabouts or his fate. Indeed, only by the shrewdest management, could Ullman extricate himself and his comrade from the suspicions and charges of the hostile throng about them, and when, at last, they had taken themselves off and quietly joined themselves to a camel transport train bound Pekin-ward, the fate of Ned Pevear was a mystery. He had vanished completely from their vision.

"Poor Ned," said Tom, in a whisper to his comrade, "I'm afraid he's done for."

The German gave the least bit of a shrug of the shoulders.

"What would you?" said he. "My young friend was so foolish—*ach*—so foolish. He fares best here who says nothing. Look you; he is lost."

CHAPTER VII

"A CIVIL OFFICIAL OF THE THIRD DEGREE"

THAT was exactly Ned Pevear's conclusion, as collared and hustled away from his travelling companions, he was unceremoniously flung back into the very boat on which he had started from Tien Tsin and floated back towards his starting point—a prisoner.

"It's all up with me, I reckon," he said to himself. "I'm a gone coon. Why don't they finish me off at once. Oh, Ned Pevear! you're a nice party for this sort of a picnic. Haven't you learned yet to hold your tongue? If ever I get out of this alive I'll know something, I reckon. But I won't get out. I'm in for it now—slow torture perhaps; but, by George! these Chinks shall see that an American dies game."

Just how this American was to die he could not discover. The Chinese soldiers on the boat were noncommittal, though had they been voluble to excess it would have told Ned Pevear nothing; for Chinese was, as you know, a sealed book to him.

So he lay, bound and silent under the hood of the

river boat, until at last it floated within sight of the square, mud walls of Tien Tsin and under the bridge that spanned the river, within the native city, then held by the Chinese. There it came at last to a stop and the prisoner was dragged to his feet and flung ashore near the big pagoda by the South Gate of Tien Tsin.

Up the main street of the filthy native city, where it runs from the South Gate to the North, the "foreign devil" disguised as a coolie, was marched and then turning aside he was halted at last before the open house that, as he knew from the seated official inside and the throng that filled the enclosure, must be the Yamen or court house of what he called "some high muck-a-muck." Indeed, it was that of the viceroy himself.

There were questions and answers as Ned stood before the viceroy. Then that official looked sternly at the lad.

"Tsung yu Pih king lae leaou?" he inquired.

Ned held his head high.

"You'll have to talk in American, sir," he said. "I don't know your lingo."

The viceroy looked around imperiously and lifted his voice in querulous questioning.

There was a pause before reply; then one stepped from the throng in the Yamen and "kotowed" before the viceroy.

With a look of relief the official bade the interpreter question the youth.

"O, hateful foreigner! the viceroy asks," said the interpreter, facing the American, "why do you appear in the clothes of a coolie when you are no coolie but a vile foreigner. Do you come from Pekin? Whither bound and why? Answer and" —here the questioner's voice dropped almost to a whisper— "watch me well, O friend, if your life is valuable."

Ned almost started at the sudden change in tone. But he recalled his inclination to question and replied boldly, "I come from America. I would join my friends in Pekin. I could not go in foreign dress— so I became a coolie—Tell me what to do, friend," he added, in the same even tone.

The interpreter gave the lad's answer to the viceroy.

"A spy?" so the interpreter translated the viceroy's decision. "A foreign spy? Give him the cangue until we may decide on a fitting death."

"The cangue! What? stick my head through a board and make a holy show of myself for you heathen Chinees? Not if I know myself. Let me loose, or I'll brain some of you," and the angry American, enraged at the thought of being thus disgraced and humiliated by "being made a raree show," struck vigorously out to the right and left,

tumbling over guards and spectators and sadly scandalizing the dignity of the viceroy's Yamen.

The interpreter clutched the boy by the arm.

"Hei! foolish one. Quiet and—trust me, or you die," he whispered, and then he explained to the honorable court that the prisoner had been made suddenly insane by his perils and privations.

"It is well, or I would have decreed the ling ch'i at once," the viceroy said. "A lunatic, you say? Possessed of the devil—a foreign devil, too? Then let him have the cangue as I decreed, until the devil is driven out. Then, when his mind is right again will we consider the death he must die."

There seemed no escape for poor Ned. Forthwith he was led from the Yamen by a guard of soldiers and handed over to the executioner's attendants in the open space back of the great guard hall of Tien Tsin for the punishment of the cangue. But, when he looked around for one friendly face, his heart gave a leap, for there among the "torture men" he recognized the face of the interpreter.

"Start not, resist not, O friend," whispered the man as, with the others, he laid heavy hands on Ned Pevear, apparently to help the executioners. "Trust me."

The horrid wooden frame, simple but severe, which is known as the cangue or cage—the wooden

Ned struck out to the right and left.

collar, really—was unlocked and Ned's head was thrust into the opening.

"Come now, this isn't as bad as it might be," said Ned to himself. "I thought it hurt terribly. But what sort of a guy must I look like waddling around with this fifty-pound block of wood around my neck. Ah! ee! but it does cut. Great Scott! I wonder how long I've got to wear this necktie."

The "necktie," as Ned called the well-known Chinese torture collar or cangue, was simply a large wooden frame, with a collar in the middle. Locked around the victim's neck it did not hurt at first, though it was a most clumsy inconvenience. But Ned soon found that the collar of the cangue rested directly on the muscles of the neck and the bones of the shoulder and that it could neither be shifted nor lightened of its grinding pressure by any movement of the head or any action of the hands. Besides, he discovered that the collar had a sharp rim underneath which cut into his neck whenever he dropped his head.

The assistants turned him loose and he tried to walk about for relief and change. But, as he declared, he could only "waddle" with that fifty-pound weight about his neck, and the muscles grew more and more tense and painful as he endeavored, vainly, to shift the weight.

"Here, around the corner, into the shadow, friend; walk there from the throng," whispered the interpreter. "Bear up and wince not. I will try and relieve you."

Ned "braced up" and moved away from the hooting crowd of spectators, to whom, indeed, the punishment of the cangue was no novelty and they did not follow him, looking rather for still more interesting and novel tortures. For the Chinaman makes a fad of torturing and, that very day, forty native Christians were to be "treated" to those refinements of Chinese cruelty—impalement, crucifixion and the dreadful ling ch'i.

Only the interpreter and his attendant coolie followed Ned at a slight distance until turning a corner beyond the guard-room building he rested in a shaded angle of the wall. Instantly the interpreter was beside him. A key was thrust into the lock of the collar and, relieved of the tension and torment, Ned, for one instant dropped to the ground.

"Up, up, it is no time for weakness," the lad's deliverer said. "See! you are my coolie, my China boy. Look! here are you— and now—close to me and speak not."

It was mighty hard for Ned not to speak, for as he rose to his feet and steadied himself against the wall he saw that the cangue was occupied by the coolie of

the interpreter. The man had simply taken his place.

"O! say! see here"—the lad began in expostulation.

The interpreter laid a hand over the American's mouth.

"Say nothing, or you lose your life," whispered the Chinaman. "Now keep close at my heels, head down and say nothing. Your life depends upon it."

Rebelling at the substitution which gave to another unmerited agony, but relieved to feel himself free from the weight and pain, Ned Pevear followed his slowly moving "master" out from the shadow of the guard house walls and up the main street to where, an oasis in the filth of Tien Tsin, a tiny, clean kept warehouse hung over the river.

Into this his conductor led him. Once within the security of its darkened interior, the lad was told to lie down on a matting couch and the interpreter said: "Rest quietly, my friend, till the strength comes back. But do you not know me? And how came you in this dangerous disguise in these times of death?"

"Do I know you?" murmured Ned, weary but wondering. "Why, no, I do not."

"You remember not the Omaha merchant who fished you from the Pei-ho, and then lost you by

your foolish leap into the water? I am he," the Chinaman said. "I could not see you die, even for this foolishness. So you are here. But—you would have gone to Pekin, and disguised in what is no disguise? Truly, brother, you are even as I told the viceroy—insane, lunatic, crazy. What would you in Pekin?"

"Save my countrymen—save my friends—save one friend—the yungvrouw Verbockhoven," replied Ned.

The Chinaman laughed a mirthless laugh.

"Ah, you Americans!" he said. "You are but children, and like children you are foolish even in your frankness. But what said our great Confucius? 'Do not be ashamed of mistakes and thus make them crimes.' You are one great mistake in your foolishness; but you glory in it and it is thus no crime. Therefore, I would help you. Lie you here and sleep and rest until I come again to you. I will get you to your own."

"To Pekin?" queried Ned.

"Not so, youth. Pekin! It is death to you in Pekin. Would you go again into the dragon's jaws?"

"But, are our people all dead in Pekin?" demanded Ned.

"Who knows," the merchant replied. "A good rat will not injure the grain near its own hole, say

our sages. Why should our people bring ruin on their nation by destroying those whom they are pledged to protect? But even the cangue, as you know, will not cure a lunatic. Even you, foolish one, would still make your way to Pekin."

"I must," Ned replied.

"Then go with your armies and not with ours; it is safer," the wise merchant advised. "Lie close here until I get you back to the invaders in the foreign concession. And once there, stay by your own standards. The dragon can twist himself in many a way and his sting is fatal."

For a day Ned lay concealed in the warehouse of the Omaha Chinaman—the man who would see his homeland Americanized and whose friendliness had saved Ned Pevear's life. Then, as the morning of the second day broke, the Omaha merchant appeared at the warehouse.

"Arise, friend," he said. "We will make the effort. Stay, let me still keep you Chinese," and he readjusted the head piece and queue that had been a part of Ned's coolie disguise. "Now, a touch more of stain and slant; that is good. And these robes; so! Now are you a civil official of the third degree—an envoy from the Yamen of the viceroy to the allied commanders."

Wondering, Ned submitted to the new disguise of silken skirt and great sleeved coat, skull cap and

embroidered square—"kindergarten pattern," he called it,—and silent, save for a word of thanks, followed the merchant from the warehouse.

Four Yamen runners, four bearers with a sedan chair, and two coolies with a wheelbarrow waited without. Ned was certain that one of the coolies was the man who acted as his substitute in the cangue. He clutched the merchant's arm.

"Is it?" he said, nodding toward the coolie; "and how?"

The Omaha merchant bent low as before a high official.

"It is," he answered in a whisper. "Cash accomplishes much; as, behold!" and with another "kotow" he waved a hand toward the sedan.

The curtains parted and Ned with as much dignity as he could command stepped into the sedan chair. The bearers lifted the poles; the merchant seated himself in the wheelbarrow and with two runners going before the sedan and two following the barrow, the strange procession went through the narrow, filthy streets of the native city, out through the south gate and on toward the foreign city, where the flags of the allies topped the mud defences.

The advance of the Yamen runners waved the white flag of truce; to Ned's surprise no one stayed or questioned them; then, before an outpost of the allies the procession stopped.

"*Halte! halte la! Qui vive?*" came the challenge of the advancing sentry.

"Ah, ha! struck a French picket, have we?" Ned said to himself, within the security of his sedan. But he made no answer. He did not wish to upset the plans of his deliverer.

Again the challenge came.

"*Qui vive?*"

"I do not know the French—is it French? Answer him, brother. We must get within the lines."

Ned summoned up his best recollections of an imperfect French, and leaning from the sedan responded to the sentry's challenge, spoken for the third time.

"*Ami!*" he said. "*Se faire annoncu!* Tell 'em we want to see 'em, right off," he added, with the regulation Anglo-Saxon idea that you must always explain your French in English.

The sentry stood in perplexity, his head on one side, his rifle half raised. Then he shouted to his comrades.

"*Hola! vite!*" he cried.

The other sentries joined him and, as they jabbered in a strange mixture of French and something else, Ned, noting their dark skins, saw that the outpost was from one of the French colonial contingents—Annam or Tonquin or some such Asiatic French.

In despair he fell back on his English.

"Send your commandant here, boys; some one who can talk English, won't you," he said, "we're refugees from—"

But he got no further. The French colonials, like others of the allied forces, had no faith in Chinese flags of truce nor in Chinamen who talked in other tongues. With a yell they swooped down upon their visitors; threw over the flag bearers, scattered the coolies, tumbled out the presumably Chinese occupants of sedan and wheelbarrow, and tying their persons together by their pig-tails, marched them off to headquarters, protesting and perplexed.

This was, to Ned, the crowning indignity. He was not accustomed to being treated in so contemptuous a manner or to suffer, in silence, so outrageous an invasion of his independence as an American. He fumed and sputtered and protested and but for the restraining actions of his companion and "bond-fellow," the Omaha merchant, he would have pulled himself free from the "bonds."

"Be you quiet, my brother," the Chinaman said. "It is but for an instant. You are among your own again. We shall both be freed when once we are delivered from these savages."

The "savages" of civilization—the swarthy French colonials—greatly enjoyed the sport, and Ned's vigorous English gave them as great delight

as his ridiculous position, lashed to another "Chinese spy;"—"*Espion Chinois!*" they repeated.

At the guard house on Railway street—the *Rue de Chemin de Fer*—near the foreign concessions, the prisoners were halted until the officer of the guard should be summoned. But even as this important and dapper Frenchman, bronzed and bedizened as a captain of colonials, came from the guard house, Ned gave a cry of delight and a leap of recognition, as he saw coming through a break in the round house, on the railroad near by, the Admiral Sir Edward Seymour, and his American friend, Captain Marshall, of the marines.

Alas! that leap did the business for poor Ned. For as he sprang from the side of his unprepared and unwatching "yoke-fellow" with the glad cry "Oh, Admiral! Say! Cap'n Marshall!" the fastenings that held his false "scalp" and Chinese queue parted with a snap and the British Admiral and the American captain, with the two young English aids of the admiral saw in surprise a Chinese "civil official of the third degree" with the tousled head of an American lad surmounting a face that might be anything but Oriental.

French colonials, English admiral, American marines and Chinese attendants broke into a roar of laughter at this impromptu uncovering of the masquerader.

Then the admiral demanded: "What have we here? What is it? And who calls us in English?"

Shamefaced and mortified at his highly undignified appearance, but delighted at this encounter, Ned stopped before the English and American officers and saluted in soldierly fashion.

"Don't you remember me, Admiral? Why! you do, Cap'n Marshall," he cried. "I'm Ned Pevear of the American marines, volunteer aid and scout, you know, on your march to Pekin."

"Why, to be sure," Captain Marshall said, coming forward with both hands extended. "Great Scott! Ned. I'd never have known you in that rig. What under the sun have you been up to? Leading the Boxers?"

"Is this a time for larking and monkey shines, sir?" demanded Sir Edward Seymour, just a bit sternly; "with our situation critical, our very existence endangered, is this a time for midshipman pranks?"

"Your pardon, exalted one," the Omaha merchant said, as he "kotowed" before the English admiral—Ned's false scalp and pig-tail still dangling from his own queue. "The young American's dress is of my doing. It was to help him escape from the rebels."

"Escape!" cried Captain Marshall. "Where from? What have you been up to, Ned Pevear?"

"Why, sir," Ned confessed; "I tried to get through to Pekin and I—"

"Got through with trying sooner than you expected, eh?" laughed the captain. "With your permission, Admiral, I will see to my young friend It was either a lark or a self-imposed mission, but he meant no harm, I am sure. May I assume charge of him"

The admiral nodded, but the French captain of colonials interfered.

"Pardon!" he said "but ze prisonnier iz of me. My garcons de piquet zey make ze capture, eh?"

"Believe me, M'sieur, it was no capture," Ned explained. "We came in the lines under the white flag, and your men disregarded it—and—treated us scandalously."

He gave a look at his dangling queue, and laughed in spite of himself.

"Our men on picket have little respect for the white flag in the hands of yonder barbarians," the admiral replied. "You remember yourself, perhaps, the treachery at the North Arsenal, do you not? You suffered from that, I believe."

"Yes, sir, but—"

Ned got no further in his reply, for just then, bang, smash! came a Chinese shell from the newly mounted guns beyond the railway bridge; it tore up a trench at the very feet of the admiral; while, fol-

lowing it quickly, crack, crang! another shell tore a ragged hole in the round house itself and the discussion as to the possession of prisoners came to a sudden termination.

"The Chinese lookout on the pagoda seems to have found the range, gentlemen," said the admiral; "they'll begin to snipe us with rifle fire too, if we crowd around here long. With your permission, Captain," he said to the French colonial officer, "I will turn over these prisoners, suspects—whatever they may be—to Captain Marshall of the American marines. They seem to be within his province, and we can safely trust them to him. This is hardly a safe place for a conference. Now, gentlemen," to his aids, "let us inspect the Japanese pony batteries by the west wall; they are to try a sortie there presently. Captain Marshall, you can examine these men and report either to me or to your Captain McCalla."

He saluted the French colonial, saluted the American officer, cast one shrewd and humorous look at Ned, the semi-mandarin, and through the new breach in the ruined round house, withdrew with his aids and his escort of British marines to the West gate. Captain Marshall and the French colonial officer exchanged courteous salutes, and then the little bunch of "prisoners"—runners, coolies and all—under guard of the swarthy French

colonials led by an American captain of marines, passed through the earthworks that defended the foreign settlement, and reported at Captain McCalla's quarters at the American consulate.

On his way thither Ned Pevear explained the situation to his friend, Captain Marshall, and received a sharp lecture from the captain on the military crime of acting without orders.

"Your friend, the English lad, Ned, was a civilian, under orders for Pekin, and not responsible to the military arm," he said. "If he decided to act on his own judgment—rash though his judgment was—that was his lookout, and the risk was his alone. But you were attached to our marine service; your orders were explicit, even though you were acting as volunteer aid and scout, and to do as you pleased was an evident and undeniable error. Our thanks are due, not to you, but to your Chinese deliverer here, for getting you out of this scrape. I thank him sincerely and will see that our commander does. As for you, Ned, I am forced to refer your breach of discipline to Captain McCalla. His decision we must abide by. I should be sorry to see you shot for desertion, my lad, but 'discipline must be maintained,' you know." And with these unpromising words Marshall went in to report to his chief, the captain of the *Newark*.

CHAPTER VIII

OVER WALL AND MOAT

NED had really little to fear beyond Captain Marshall's "raking over the coals," and the grim pleasantry that suggested a drum-head court martial and a deserter's fate.

His anxiety, indeed, was of short duration; for the captain returned speedily from his conference with Captain McCalla.

"Do as you see fit, Marshall," Captain McCalla said. The brave commander of the *Newark* was still half invalided from the wounds he had received in his gallant work with Seymour's column when, from Taku to Lang Fang and back again to Tien Tsin, McCalla was the right hand of the admiral, and, though wounded by shot and torn by a shell, he never "stopped for repairs," but holding his men to their hot work on the firing line, "hobbled into Tien Tsin at their head." Like that brave prince Emilius in the Moscow campaign:

"His valor shed victorious grace on all that dread retreat."

When

" Every follower of his sword could all endure and dare,
Becoming warriors, strong in hope or stronger in despair."

" Do as you see fit," he said; " the lad is a gallant youth and between you and me I like to see a fellow ready to take risks and willing to brave all to deliver his friends from peril. Ned's got the right stuff in him, as his father's son would be sure to have. Your threat is all the raking he needs, I reckon, you ruthless old sun-downer. Set him to work at the front; there's plenty for him to do, heaven knows! and for us, too. But say, Captain! Do the square thing by that American Chinaman who helped him out of his scrape. Such virtue needs to be rewarded."

So Ned Pevear's mind was relieved, and the " American Chinaman " was duly complimented.

" But don't you try any more side expeditions on your own hook, Ned," the captain cautioned the lad. " There's enough work cut out right here in Tien Tsin for you, without attempting to relieve Pekin. We'll attend to that all in due time. And as for you, sir," he added, turning to the Omaha merchant, " we are united in requesting you to remain here also, and act as interpreter between your countrymen and ours. Such English-speaking Chinamen as you are rare and your services would be of much greater benefit to us than the ' pidgin

talk' of the concession. May we hope for your help?"

"Exalted Captain," the Christianized Chinaman said with a graceful salute, "you and the captains are most kind. But I am of China, although, too, I am of America. My interests are both here and there, and while I pray to see China Americanized, I cannot help to overthrow my native land, or assist the foreigners who have come to carve out of China, colonies for themselves. To help you to the relief of your people in Pekin, that is good; that I, too, would bring about. But when Pekin is in your hands—what then? Where will poor China be? At the mercy of Russia and Japan, who hate her; of Germany and England who covet her lands, and of these other foreign rulers who would have their hands also in the plate—all, save the Americans. You, I believe, are here only for mercy and not for loot. Let me return to my own behind the high walls yonder. A string of cash also accomplishes much in my China, and I may be of more service to you over there than acting as interpreter and gaining only the hatred and vengeance of my brothers on the other side."

The wise Chinaman's plea was good and therefore was granted. Ned bade him a warm and hearty farewell, and by a roundabout route with his coolies the merchant took his way back to the native city.

But Ned found immediate service as messenger and aid under Captain Marshall's orders between the concession compound and the trenches that guarded the advanced firing line.

For days these trenches and the defences of the foreign concession were in the teeth of a continual fire and in the track of relentless warfare. The shell fire from the Chinese guns was incessant and for nearly a week the hard pressed and outnumbered allies acted almost solely on the defensive—"the troops of the eight foremost nations of the world," so Mr. Palmer declares, "all but besieged by—well, by the Chinese."

"We live and learn, Ned," Captain Marshall said to the lad one day, as from the signal tower of Gordon Hall, the loftiest building in Tien Tsin, they watched the artillery duel. "Time was when our fellows used to say that one white man with a stick could lick all China. But that doesn't look like it, does it?"

He pointed off to where beyond the railway bridge across the river the Chinese guns, eight in number, practically flanked the allied forces and, well masked behind mud earthworks, raked the railway station and all the section thereby; he called Ned's attention to the Chinese sharpshooters, concealed behind the big salt piles opposite the French concession from which they "sniped" at everything

in sight, and he showed the young American what foreign teaching had done for the Chinese fighters, in giving them wit and wisdom enough to use their fancy looking pagodas for watch and signal towers from which to note and check every movement of their enemy.

"Just as Tom and I did on the temple roof up the line," Ned remarked. "But can't our men put a stop to all this?"

"Evidently the Japs are going to try," Captain Marshall remarked with a critical look. "See, there they go, hiking it to the west gate—pony batteries, ammunition, artillerists, spades and doctors. And there goes the Jap cavalry on a reconnaissance. Hurry, Ned! Jump on your pony. My compliments to the Japanese major in command of the cavalry and ask if you may not accompany them. I'd like to know how near the Chinks are bringing their lines."

Ned saluted and dashed down to the street. The next instant he was on his waiting "griffin," and galloping away to the Japanese cavalry barracks.

"All right, all right," the cavalry major said, as Ned reported his captain's desire. "Proud we are to have you by us. America and Japan shall feel this enemy, together."

Ned fell in behind the little Japanese major and the whole cavalry detachment swung out of the west

gate and galloped toward the river, while the artillery, fine jaunty little brass field pieces and "fixings," made for the open space beyond the west wall where they might get a chance at the big Chinese battery.

The reconnaissance drew out the enemy and a sharp little fight was on, in which the dash and efficiency of the Japanese sent their hereditary foemen skurrying back to the shelter of their earthworks, greatly to Ned's delight; but it drew out more, also. For it showed the Japanese major that during the night the Chinese besieging lines had been extended fully two miles; a swarm of coolies working on one new embrasure had mounted a great gun to command the allied line, while to the south, a massing of banners showed that Boxers, Imperial troops, or both, were gathering for a nearer and formidable attack on the foreign concessions.

"All is not well, my friend," the Japanese major remarked, as through his glasses he studied the Chinese advance. "Pray oblige me, sir; gallop back to your command and report to the generals what we have seen. It is to me apparent that we are still more endangered. Only a little farther need the enemy go to place his left on the river yonder and thus threaten, if not destroy our connection at Taku, by driving back or off, our tugs and lighters. It is serious, my friend. Pray report it at once."

Ned galloped back and reported. The result was that, after an artillery duel all that day, in which the great twelve pounder of the British warship *Terrible*—"the gun that saved Ladysmith"—gave back the Chinese "compliments" in great shape, and the destructive work on both sides wrecked buildings and ended life in both sections of Tien Tsin, the allied commanders agreed upon a sortie and before daybreak next morning the desperate move was made.

It seemed desperate because twenty-five hundred men were to charge against an unknown number of Chinamen, fighters or fanatics all.

But desperate conditions breed desperate efforts. Out of their defences streamed the allied troops—Japanese, British, Russians and American marines. They were the forlorn hope of the environed invaders and gallantly they buckled down to their work.

In five hours it was all over. The indomitable Japanese—one thousand in all—by a successful flank movement, swept down upon the three thousand troops of Neh, the Chinese general, flanked them, captured their siege guns with five of their great banners and, sweeping the Chinamen off in flight, left them an easy mark for the little cavalrymen of Japan, who charged through the fleeing ranks at a great gallop, cutting down soldiers and Boxers as they rode.

It was a daring move in the game of war and Ned's pulse beat quick as he watched the splendid charge. And when the Japs rode back and seemed scarcely able to hold themselves in check while the allied cannon shelled the Western Arsenal, Ned was as restless as they and was the first to dash away with his comrades when the one hundred American marines and the thousand Japs started in a race for the West Arsenal, now breached by the allied guns.

Away from the Taku gate they dashed at the foe, while the Russian six hundred chafed to be held in reserve and the Japanese cavalry protected the flanks of the assaulters. Then came the dose of cold steel against which the Chinese soldiers have never yet been able to stand. Into the re-formed ranks dashed the charge, firing as they ran and then with bayonets, ready to prick and push, British, Japanese and the thin line of American marines overwhelmed and overthrew the united force of Boxers and Imperial troops, who scattered and fled before an onset they could neither face nor repel.

In a panic they broke for the stone walls of the native city; defeated and swept within their works, they yielded the ground to the invaders and, together, Japanese infantrymen and American marines, reached the Western Arsenal. But Japan was first in numbers as in position, and as a result of the sprinting match the wiry little flagbearer from

Nagasaki was first within the embattled wall; then the Japanese flag streamed in triumph above the captured wall of the West Arsenal, while the American marines joined their voices to the triumphant cheers of their boon comrades and shouted "Nippon! Nippon! Hey-hey-hey-Nippon!" until they were hoarse.

Ned Pevear was, at all events. He had pressed almost to the head of the charge; he had fought side by side with the Japanese heroes, and, while disappointed that the flag bearer from the island Empire had outstripped the flag bearer of the great republic, he was generous in his shouts of approval and pleasure and loudest in his salute to the red sphere on the white ground that represented the sovereignty of Japan.

So the danger to the communications of the allies, threatened by the extended lines of the Chinese, was temporarily over and the danger of being overwhelmed by Chinese hosts and Chinese batteries was, for a time, removed. But the allied leaders knew that fresh troops were pouring in to the reinforcing of the Chinese, and it was but a question of time how soon the yellow bannermen and ferocious Boxers, by sheer weight of men and metal, should encompass and crush the foreign force.

At once Admiral Seymour ordered all non-combatants to leave Tien Tsin, and that very day, hun-

dreds of refugees, most of them women and children, were sent down the Pei-ho to Taku, on tugs and lighters, fleeing for safety from the relentless and revengeful Boxers.

The ten thousand allied defenders of Tien Tsin were well-nigh spent; fresh help was needed, in men and guns, if the Chinese besiegers were to be successfully resisted. So Ned was despatched as special messenger down the river to supplement the earlier appeals to the Admirals to hasten the reinforcements and rush forward the guns.

On the swiftest launch procurable Ned steamed down the river, past floating bodies of dead Chinamen, past low banks torn by shell and slippery with slime, past lighters and tugs bearing their precious freights of refugees and wounded down to the warships and transports in the harbor, and finally tied up at the fort-landing at Taku.

There good news met him. The Ninth U. S. Infantry, Colonel Liscum's regiment, just arrived from the Philippines, had landed from the transport *Logan* and were already transshipping on the lighters that were to rush them to Tien Tsin. Japanese and Russian troops were also due, and the warships in the harbor were stripping themselves of all the cannon they could spare from their armament and sending them up the river to the beleaguered allies.

But with good news came bad; terrible tidings they were that Ned gathered at Taku. The foreigners in Pekin were all dead, so the tidings ran. Tuan, the bloodthirsty leader of the Boxers and the Imperial troops had battered down the walls of the legations with his heaviest guns, and through the breach, with fire and sword, the victorious besiegers had swarmed in for their vengeance, and the accredited representatives of the great Powers—with their women and children, their guests and staffs, their slender force of guards, their servants and the refugees they were protecting, so said the report, had all perished in an awful carnival of blood.

Ned was almost dazed by this terrible news, even as the world itself, for an instant, stood still with horror as the dreadful tidings spread abroad.

"Poor Tom!" he said. "I wonder how it was with him; and that pretty Lisbet? Horrible! it is all too horrible. Oh! why could not I have got through to their succor—and my own death, probably? The villains! the barbarians! We'll wipe 'em from the face of the earth."

"How are you going to do it, lad?" queried the surgeon-major who had gone back with him on the launch. "Do you know China's mighty population? It is enough to spread the Yellow Terror over the whole world as master, if only these Chinamen know their power and can fight as the Jappies

do. Why, sir, they have a fighting strength of forty millions; they eat nothing—to speak of; they need nothing, such as our troops demand, and are capable as you know, of being drilled into good soldiers, quick to master the use of modern guns and readily made into serviceable soldiers."

"Yes, but I've seen 'em fight," said Ned. "They're fair gunners for a bombardment; but they can no more stand in the field against our troops—the allied troops, I mean—than the Filipinos could stand before Lawton's men."

"Not now, perhaps; but they're patient and persistent," the surgeon-major replied. "We may lick 'em now—I hope we shall; but you mark my word, lad, this situation we're up against has got to be mighty carefully handled by the Powers or they may take a wrong step and the first one toward raising up a yellow peril that may in time overwhelm and absorb all the white nations of the earth."

Ned Pevear had no faith in such a pessimistic statement, and he said so. He believed too implicitly in the civilization of the white man and the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon to admit any such possibility as the surgeon-major raised; but he was nevertheless terribly disturbed by the sad news from Pekin, and it was the first news almost that he confided to Captain Marshall, after he reported the coming of the reinforcements and the guns.

"Via Shanghai, eh, Ned?" said the captain. "I don't trust these Shanghai despatches; they're always exaggerated, over-alarming or absolutely false. Those Chinamen there have a rumor factory in full blast, and you always want to take their reports with a big grain of salt. The Chinamen are not all fools; some of 'em, even up at Pekin, can look beyond their noses, and they know that such a massacre of legation people as you report would set the whole world aflame and lead to a universal war with China. I tell you, Ned, I won't believe this is true until I stand inside of the walls of Pekin, and see for myself."

The captain's faith greatly strengthened Ned.

"Then you believe we will be in Pekin, sometime?" he said.

"Sure," Captain Marshall replied. "That's what we're here for, isn't it? And we fellows generally get what we go for. Just you wait until the Ninth goes in. You'll see the fur fly, then."

The Ninth came up on the lighters and disembarked at Tien Tsin, and every American in the beleagured town cheered to the echo as the big regulars in blue and khaki came swinging into the camp.

Scant time had the new arrivals for rest. Even as they landed a new battle was on. Fukushima, the "square-jawed and tireless" Japanese general had no use for rest or delay; he was there to drive the Chinese from their stronghold, and he had vowed

that the banner of the red sphere should float above the captured walls of the Chinese city before noon. So the British marines and the Welsh Fusileers, the French colonials, the disciplined Chinese of the British-Asiatic forces, with Fukushima's Japanese, Major Waller's American Marines and two battalions of the Ninth U. S. Infantry were marshalled into a composite force—six thousand men in all—to assault the Chinese defences, while the Russians were to flank the enemy on the east and capture the troublesome forts that protected the besiegers at that point.

It was a beautiful plan of action, if only there had been a better unity of forces and all had kept their heads. But when the Japanese engineers started to rush across the little bridge over the canal and blow up the South Gate so that the infantry of the composite force could storm through the breach and into the city—behold! some shrewd Chinaman had been before the Japanese general, and the bridge was gone!

Nothing daunted the Japanese general, Fukushima, and the English general, Dorwood, who were the joint commanders of the composite force, determined to push on the assault.

"Go in! everybody," came the general order; and marines, infantrymen, Japanese, British and Americans went charging in towards the gate, pell

mell, through the mud wall of the outer city to the gate in the stone wall of native Tien Tsin.

Ned Pevear was with the little detail of marines that tried to rush the three field guns over the moat and through the outer gate so as to bring them to bear upon the inner gate. But the road was a narrow one and before long the three guns were badly mired at the side of the road and were so commanded by the fire of the Chinese riflemen and artillerists stationed on the inner wall that the situation became almost unbearable.

Ned had galloped up with orders from Colonel Meade to get the guns through at all hazards, and as he came up to the mired guns, with the Chinese shells bursting in the soft mud all about them, and the winging shots of the Chinese riflemen swishing and pinging above the heads of the sweating marines he rode into an atmosphere of bad language and grim determination.

The boy was off his pony in an instant.

"Now then, boys, we've got to go in, that's all there is about it. The colonel says so," he cried, and then he, too, was tugging at the ropes.

Pouf! crash! burst the shells; ping! ping! rang the bullets. "Now boys, say you will! One-two-three! rush 'em!" came the call from the grizzled old sergeant of the gun crew.

It was the tug of war, muscle against mud. Suddenly, while the iron hail fell all about them, muscle won, and Ned gave a ringing hurrah! as the wheels moved, and the sweating, struggling "strenuous" men fairly yanked the mired guns out of the mud, up to the road and across the bridge that spanned the moat into the safety of the screen of the wall.

Then out of the long grass, suddenly, as if by magic, so it seemed to Ned, came the charge of the allies, "going in," as three thousand men and more swung along the road and over the moat, following the lead of the marines and their guns. Ned wheeled about to join Major Waller, and as he did so he ran almost into the arms of the veterans of San Juan fight—Liscum of the Ninth and his regulars.

Head up, not minding the spatter and swish of the Chinese fire more than a summer shower the stalwart colonel looked at the moat.

"Hm! the British general told us to go in," he said; "and go it is. I wish I knew the lay of this land better. I wonder if that moat is fordable. Is it, son?" he queried, as his eye rested on Ned Pevear.

The lad saluted. "I think not, Colonel," he said; "never knew a Chinese moat that was. Whenever they build a wall they always stick a bottomless ditch around it. I wonder why?"

"They've never got beyond the middle ages yet, son," replied the colonel. "Come on, boys, we'll let a blast of the Nineteenth Century into 'em."

Then, with its colonel leading, the Ninth Infantry crossed the bridge and went charging through the outer gate—to death!

Ned watched the gallant boys in blue and khaki, and then, reporting to Major Waller, was soon hurrying forward with the American Marines and the Welsh Fusileers—those inseparable companions of march and assault, fun and fighting—as they hurried to the south gate which the Japanese engineers were to blow up—and did not.

"Never mind, boys, we'll get it all the same," cried Waller. "Now! over the wall with you! Charge!"

The straggling lines of Briton and Yankees, Marines and Fusileers—leaped to the assault—scarcely a hundred in all.

The Chinese battery of ten guns that commanded the wall opened upon them as they came; but over the wall, like rabbits on the jump, and then across the open space and straight at the Chinese battery they leaped and raced—and Ned was with them too.

"Up go the colors!" he cried, as he raced beside the flag. Then he saw stars and tumbled in a heap at the very foot of the fort.

CHAPTER IX

IN DEFEAT AND VICTORY

It was only a spent ball, a stumble and a blinding puff of dust that threw Ned Pevear to his knees; but it was enough to drop him out of the rush for a moment, and when his "daze" was gone the charge had passed over and beyond him. The hundred "web feet" and Fusileers were already at the fort, and as Ned raced to catch up with the charge he let out so vigorous a yell that the Chinese gunners on the wall believed that a new host of "foreign devils" was swarming down upon them, and they had but scant courage with which to meet the Anglo-Saxon on-rush that stormed against their defences.

The Anglo-Saxon, indeed, gave the yellow man scant time for new courage. Into the fort Yankees and Britishers poured and grappling in a hand-to-hand fight with those of the Chinese garrison who had not turned in flight, they slashed this way and that, like the dashing and immortal six hundred at Balaklava,

"Sabering the gunners while all the world wondered,"

until, in so brief a time that it was over almost before it began, the fort was cleared of its Chinese defenders, and, even as Waller's men had done before on Tien Tsin's defences, the Chinese guns were turned upon their former owners, and once again, Anglo-Saxon audacity and swiftness had won the day.

So Ned decided. But the day was not yet won. The South Gate which was to be breached and carried still held out, and the storm of Chinese shot and shell was flinging havoc into the allied ranks.

Above the mud wall, which Ned now climbed to view the field, unheeding the spat-spat of the Chinese riflemen, or the swish and plunge of the "gingall" balls, the investigator could see the road to the West Gate, thronged with a mass of native troops, with mounted officers and streaming banners.

"They're going to fight us in the open, I do believe," Ned decided, and straightway reported the news to Captain Marshall.

"Send your marines down there, Captain," said Colonel Meade. "Let 'em skirt inside of the mud wall and be ready to stand off the Boxers if they make a break for the gate."

A thin line of marines responded to the order and drew up at the gate waiting to repel an assault of thousands, which if made must have swamped the

slender force of defenders. But evidently the Chinese fighters preferred the shelter of stone walls to a scrimmage in the open, for they hung on the flank of the allies for hours and never tried an advance or attack.

Once again came the call for the marines.

"The Ninth is catching it hot," said Colonel Meade, as a messenger dashed up with a report. "Captain Marshall, get your company in action and hurry to Colonel Liscum's aid."

The Ninth was catching it with a vengeance, as Ned discovered, when marching into action with Captain Marshall's company, he camped down on the firing line among the mounds of Chinese graves. The marines' inseparables, the British Fusileers, were supporting them; but the Ninth, freshly arrived and unused as yet to the Chinese mud and marshes, were holding the advance in an open field between the river and the wall trying vainly to cross the moat to the attack on the defenders of the wall who were pouring down upon the assailants a relentless rain of artillery, rifle and machine guns.

It was a dangerous position to hold, and in the face of that fire equally fatal to advance or retreat. By a blunder the Americans had been ordered to that exposed position and dearly did they pay for the brigadier's blunder.

But it was a day of blunders. There was lack of

preparation, lack of co-operation and lack of leadership. That fierce little fighter, the general of the Japanese, had failed to blow up the South Gate because of the broken approaches and the withering fire from the wall; the Russian general who was to capture the Chinese forts that commanded the approaches failed to reduce them, also because of the Chinese fire; and the British general, a bureau officer rather than a battlefield leader, sent in new men helter skelter, to hold an untenable position—but they held it!

"By Jove!" said the captain of the Fusileers, as under questionable cover he and Ned Pevear watched the gallant Ninth, "Your infantry stick to it jolly well, don't you know. They ought never to have gone in there; but the way they hold the line just means that the Chinks can't turn the right of our attacking line and cut into the French and the Jappies."

Foot by foot the Ninth had "inched along" the marshes that bordered the river toward the western gate and there they lay in the mud, without food or water, their ammunition gone, their gallant colonel dead.

"Keep up the firing," were the last words of Colonel Liscum, as the big, dauntless and veteran fighter died beside the ditch he was attempting to cross, and the Ninth kept up the firing until they had only sufficient ammunition left to repel a charge.

But the Chinese, as the men of the Ninth did not then know, are not partial to a charge. Instead, they stuck to their barricades across the river in a burned suburb beneath the inner wall and there with cannon shot, and rifle shot and Nordenfelt gun they peppered the marsh-surrounded men of the Ninth, sniping the wounded, popping at the hospital helpers and holding the allies at bay.

"Something must be done here," said Captain Marshall. "Ride, run, Ned," he commanded. "Report the situation to General Dorwood. We can't stay here to see those new fellows of the Ninth shot down like sheep or be sniped ourselves. We've either got to retreat or we must have reinforcements enough to rush those walls."

Ned dashed over the swamp broken field until he skirted the Japanese and British forces and at last came up to the British general at his advanced "headquarters" behind the mud wall.

The general was hot and worried. He had a larger contract than he was able to handle and, somehow, he and the Japanese leader had failed to connect. The demands for help that came to him were more than he could answer.

"And why have not the Tree forts fallen, sir?" he demanded of the Russian aid who had just ridden in to report.

"Ah, sir," the Russian replied. "They are too

much, these forts—too much, General. You just poke your head over the wall and they will fire shrapnel at you. To reduce them we must have help."

"Um!" said the Englishman; "bluffed eh? Well, sir?" this to [illegible].

"Captain Marshall's compliments—of the American Marines, sir," explained Ned. "The Ninth and the Marines are both enfiladed in the marshes. He requests help or orders."

"Um!" again the general remarked. "Well, sir, if the Russians have not reduced the forts, of course the whole scheme of attack falls through and we shall have to withdraw."

"But our men cannot withdraw, sir, while that fire is raking them," Ned reported. "The Chinese snipe every man that gets up from the marsh grass. The wounded are taken from the field in a perfect rain of bullets?"

"We'll have to withdraw after dark then," said the general calmly. "It's a very pretty movement—this withdrawing under cover of darkness," he added, with scientific enthusiasm. "My compliments to the commander of the American infantry. Tell him I blame myself for the mistake in placing his troops in a position that men unacquainted with the ground should not have occupied. I regret the loss of their Colonel, Liscum, and I appreciate the honor of hav-

ing him and his men under my command. But they must withdraw; the position is not tenable; tell the commander to have his men, when withdrawn, sleep upon their arms, for we shall renew the attack in the morning. And, on your way back, sir," the general continued, "if you can find the Japanese general—General Fukushima—pray inform him of my action in ordering withdrawal and ask him kindly to co-operate."

Ned rode back with the general's orders, cast down and disappointed.

"Withdraw? fall back?" he said. "I don't like that. I came to ask for reinforcements not for retreat orders. Our boys aren't here to go back. I wonder—ah! there's the Japs' line. I suppose I must hunt up their general and give him Dorwood's message."

Three hundred yards beyond the English position, Ned rode into the Japanese lines, and found the little, plucky, square-jawed general.

"Is it to retreat he advises?" Fukushima cried. "Never, sir! when my men move it will be that they go forward. We have breached the enemy's walls; we will charge them in the morning."

Ned almost cheered when he heard the little general's brave assertion.

"Ah, sir, you Japanese are fighters," he said. "But I'm afraid our boys can't hold their position

out there in the marshes unless they have more help. Our ammunition is gone and we've nothing to eat."

"It is bad," the Japanese said. "Your fresh troops, unknowing the ground and with scant ammunition and food, should never have been sent to that exposed and advanced position. Let your commander have his troops withdraw, as the General Dorwood advises, for rest and relief, and they will be better prepared for the fight we must have in the morning. All night will I batter the walls with lyddite shells and that will give me a breach to storm through by daylight. Courage, my young friend! We are as good as in the city, even now."

So Ned rode away, as braced up by the Japanese general's optimism as he had been cast down by the report of the British general.

"Those Japs are fighters!" the lad declared to himself. "By George! they just won't give up. It looks to me like a defeat. We were going to be in the city by noon, and here it is night and we're not in yet. Instead, we've got to pull out. Well, what's the odds! We'll be in that city yet, or I don't know what fighting is."

Ned that day certainly had ample opportunity to learn what fighting was. Never before had the Chinese been so obstinate in resistance or so accurate in their aim; never had the Japanese been more daring, the British more firm or the Americans more

tenacious of their hold. But all day the battle had gone steadily against the allies. There was lack of co-operation; no one commander (save Colonel Liscum, who had gone in to win) would take orders from an allied commander; there were blunders in plans, blunders in action, blunders in details. When night came down, it fell upon the allies still held at bay, partially retreating and practically defeated, counting their losses and binding up their wounds outside the walls of the inner city of Tien Tsin which they had expected to capture easily before noon of that unlucky day.

When Ned rode back to the American line where cheek by jowl, Yankee marines and Welsh Fusileers held their position, Captain Marshall met him.

"Well, Ned, where are the reinforcements?" he demanded.

"There are none, Captain," Ned replied. "General Dorwood advises withdrawal, until morning."

The captain of marines dug his heel into the ground, and said nothing.

"Well, we've done our best," he said, at length. "With all the strings pulling different ways how could we help getting into a snarl. But, by George! it's rough, Think of the brave fellows we've had shot down trying to hold untenable positions and advancing unsupported. Push on to the firing line, Ned. See if you can find Major Lee of the Ninth

and give him General Dorwood's orders. Then find Major Waller and see if we can be of any benefit to his marines."

Ned dashed away to bear his orders to the Ninth. The moon, now clouded, now uncovered, gave but uncertain guidance to his steps, but he scarce needed that as he skirted the stream of litters and carts going in, and the stream of burden bearers and improvised ambulance teams coming out. For those going in were empty; but those coming out were full. The gallant Ninth had received a baptism of fire in Chinese battle that day that had cast their Santiago experiences far in the shade.

The moon struggled out of the flying clouds as Ned, for the fortieth time, slipped aside for the litter bearers to pass. And as he did so, he looked upon the face of the still form on the litter and his young heart fairly burst over the sacrifice he saw. For the moonbeams fell upon the face of the dead Colonel of the Ninth, the brave Liscum, who obeyed orders even though he knew them to be a blunder, the gallant veteran of four wars, dead in his fifth, unconscious of his country's reward for gallant service, slated for the promotion that was never to come to him on earth.

Ned uncovered as the hero passed; he remembered how Lawton died in Luzon, and his heart was sad, while his tongue was silent. Then he pushed on to the advance.

"I must withdraw," said Major Lee of the Ninth. "My men are dead tired, hungry and without ammunition. Our position is simply untenable."

And then with marvellous skill, by what the British general applauded as "a delicate military operation finely carried out," the shattered Ninth withdrew from the position it had held, practically alone and unsupported, for twelve hours never yielding a foot, and the disastrous day before Tien Tsin came to a gloomy close.

But before he slept Ned hurried across the open plain to where by the western gate Major Waller and his marines were guarding the rear. Among the dead and the sleeping, Ned found the Major, alert as ever, letting his men take their rest, but with his eye open for trouble.

He was sure he had spied it when Ned came to him with Captain Marshall's inquiry.

"Thanks, lad," he said, "I don't know as the captain can help me—yet. I may need him later. Look over yonder. What do you see?"

Ned peered into the darkness.

"A lot of lights moving every which way, sir," he replied.

"That's right," the major said. "I think the Chinks are cooking up some sort of a night attack. If they are, my night's work is cut out for me. My compliments to Captain Marshall, and tell him to

keep an eye open—and an ear, too. I may need him before morning."

But he did not need him. The Chinese behind the city wall, although they had "stood off" the allies all that day of battle had done so at terrible loss. Counting their dead and wounded their courage gave way. Still before them lay the allied forces of the "foreign devils," who did not know when they were whipped, but kept banging away at the thirty foot walls with those horrible lyddite shells, knocking over huts and houses and bringing ruin and death in their path. They never reasoned that the losses of the allies might cripple and deter the attacking forces; they saw only their own losses and, losing heart, determined to withdraw out of harm's way. Those moving lights that Major Waller and Ned Pevear had seen were not massing for a night attack; they meant retreat. And sure enough, when morning dawned, the walls of Tien Tsin were undefended; the town was vacant of soldiers; the Chinese had fled, and the city of Tien Tsin lay open before the persistent and determined allies.

The Japanese were in first. But Ned Pevear was a close second. Tired though he was he could not sleep, and when at midnight there came a lull in the fire of the lyddite shells banging away at the South Gate, the sudden silence woke the boy from his heavy but uncertain sleep and he was quickly on his

feet, straining an ear to listen. Then he heard from the Japanese lines, the clear notes of a bugle, the cries of command, the noise of shuffling feet. Like a flash he broke away from the bivouac of the marines and hastened to the Japanese line.

The troops were already in motion.

"Nippon! Nippon!" cried Ned, as he joined the Jap advance, and then at double quick, through the yawning breaches at the South Gate and through the frowning gateway itself, the soldiers of the restless and watchful Fukushima dashed into the city and before three o'clock of that mid-July morning Ned and the Japanese general stood within the inner wall of the native city.

"General," said the lad, saluting, "I am of the American Marines. Will you use me as volunteer aid? I'd like to make myself useful."

"Ah! it is the wide-awake young American, eh?" said Fukushima. "It is good, young sir; you are in at the death, is it so? Go, tell your commander we are in the city. Let the bombarding not begin again. We need only silent guns now, save where my infantry keep the enemy quiet yonder where some of them would make an annoyance of us beyond the walls. Let the allies enter, while I break in these houses near the gate which may hold guns and ammunition or, perhaps, ambushed Chinese. We will make the conquest complete this time."

Ned saluted again and corralling a stray "griffin," rode back through the ruined gate toward the lines of the sleeping allies.

He roused Marshall and Meade and Coolidge; he roused the marines and the men of the Ninth, the Welsh Fusileers and the British general.

"We are in the city," he cried. "The general of the Japs has sent me to say no more firing. We're in the city!"

Then at last the allies were all astir and pouring into the captured city now, it seemed, in flames as the shops along the main street between the North Gate and the South caught from the fire that blazed within the pagoda area of the great South Gate; and then the looting began.

Ned did not like the looks of that. The orders to the American troops had been to respect private property and to take nothing in the way of spoil from the enemy.

But what is to be done when a town is in flames? If goods and curios are not taken they will be burned, and if one side spares them the other will not—for the Chinese mob is the most untrammeled of looters.

Ned thought of his old friend Maskin, the English free lance who, if you recall the story of "Lawton and Roberts," had, you know, been with him in the Philippines and whose first thought after victory had always been *dinero,* or loot.

"I wonder what Maskin would have done here?" the American said, as in the burning, filthy main street of native Tien Tsin he stood in the midst of men of all nationalities rushing this way and that, loaded down with loot—silks and furs and finest cloths, vases and ornaments and other spoil of the wrecked and burning shops, with terrified Chinamen waving white flags, or "kotowing" in abject submission, or seeking to placate the conquering foreign devils with offerings of cakes and melons and mysterious Chinese food.

"Ullo! young 'un, 'ere we hare, eh?" a voice greeted him and turning Ned saw the old sergeant of British Marines who had stood with him in that first fight with the Boxers on the railway near Lang Fang. "Wot hare you catching? Hany think good."

"I don't think we ought to, sergeant," the American replied. "Our orders are dead against it."

"Ho! horders be blowed!" the sergeant replied and he pushed before him an overburdened coolie, weighed down with the sergeant's spoil of sable and mink and Thibet wool. "This 'ere stuff is better off with me than burning up in a store 'ouse. Wot was it one of you Yankee fellers said once: 'To the victors belong the spoils.' H'aint we the victors, I arsk ye? And this 'ere Tien Tsin is a bloomin' good fur market. Dip in for yourself, lad. This is one of the times it's worth bein' in the service."

But Ned could not feel that way. To him orders were orders, and must be obeyed. So, while he stood thus, a spectator rather than a participant, he found himself surrounded by bowing and kotowing Chinamen with hands full of proffered cakes and, on their lips, the plea for passes—passes that should let them through the allied lines.

"I don't know what you want, boys," said the American. "No, I don't want your cakes, thank you. I don't know what's in 'em. Hardtack's safer. 'Plassy'—'plassy'—what's 'plassy'?"

"They ask for passes, O friend, passes to give them safety within your lines," a voice replied in explanation, and looking down from where he stood on the steps that led up to the pagoda on the wall, Ned spied his old friend, the Omaha merchant.

He grasped the Chinaman's hands cordially.

"So, you're here, and alive, eh?" he cried. "Show me that cangue, will you? It's the only thing I want of all the loot. I'd like to send that home as a keepsake, just to show folks what I've 'gone through' in China, you know."

The Chinese merchant failed to appreciate Ned's joke, even as he could not understand why in the midst of a plundered city this American lad should prefer an ugly wooden collar to the riches of the wrecked bazaars.

He said as much and Ned explained that he

couldn't take any loot without disobeying orders and that he had suffered quite enough already by breaking orders.

"Ah! but this is different, my friend," the Omaha merchant said. "Give to me the pass that holds me safe among the allies, and I will show you treasures that you may have without disobeying your orders."

Ned wrote the pass—every "ally" did, in whatever language was his own,—and soon found himself in such demand for similar passes from the clamorous crowd that thronged the pagoda steps that he was glad to escape the crush and to follow his Omaha friend out of the press and around to the space beside the Viceroy's Yamen, where he had worn the wooden collar.

Before the blackened walls of the Yamen, a group of French marines had thrown down a great pile of loot and were now banqueting on the confiscated pigs that are the street scavengers of every native Chinese city. They offered Ned a share of the feast, but he declined with thanks and following his conductor, soon stood within a storehouse behind the Yamen walls into which no foreigner had yet penetrated.

"See, my friend, here are the treasures of a city—official stealings wrung by the tyrant officials from their subjects as bribe and spoil. Pick—select—take! Is it not yours who have conquered and driven

away these bribe-takers of the Manchu usurpers, these upstart Tartars who have made my China what she is to-day?"

Ned hesitated. It was a temptation, but he still resisted it.

"It is not right," he said. "I must obey orders, you know."

"But this is not private spoil, this is not robbing the people," said the merchant. "This is yours, as victor. Look! here are jade and pearl and coral, Here is a viceroy's ransom. Here—"

The Omaha merchant got no further. Ned's roving eyes, taking in the tempting view, followed the lantern gleam no longer in the darkened room. It was dark indeed; darker than ever for himself and his Chinese friend.

For while to their ears came the cry of the victors, telling of spoil and conquest, over their heads were suddenly dropped some enveloping, imprisoning, blinding wrapping, and then, thrown down, sightless, gagged and bound, while not a sound or a word told, in the darkness who their captors were, Ned Pevear and his companion lay prisoners, entrapped and overpowered within the viceroy's treasure house.

CHAPTER X

OUT OF THE VICEROY'S TREASURE HOUSE

UNNERVED and almost for the instant unmanned by his sudden surprise and overthrow, Ned lay still for an instant, uncertain what to do.

Indeed, he could do but little to free himself. Bound, gagged and blinded, he could scarce move hand or foot, while his mouth was too effectually stopped to call out or to question. So he lay silent and quiet.

What perplexed him the most was the uncertainty as to the loyalty and honesty of the Omaha merchant who had led him into this latest scrape. For, while he had grown to believe and trust in the Americanized Chinaman, it was certain that it was this man who had led him into the viceroy's treasure house, who had been with him at the moment of surprise and who had—here Ned's reasoning went wild as he remembered that the Chinaman also had been overcome and bound like himself.

And why should he have been thus decoyed, betrayed and bound, he wondered? Why was he not

killed at once by these secret defenders of the viceroy's treasure? Why had he not—well! it was all a puzzle, he declared to himself, and what was the use of attempting to unravel it? Besides, there he lay, bound hand and foot. It was better to study how he could free himself rather than wonder how he got there.

But to free himself, just then, was a problem beyond his solving. He could only lie still and plan impossibilities until the weariness of his exertions of the day before overcame even his anxiety and perplexity, and he dropped into a heavy sleep.

When he awoke he was conscious of motion; he was being carried somewhere, but how or where he could not determine. He tried to discover his condition and surroundings by exploration with hand and foot; but hand and foot were still bound, and his head was still muffled as, indeed, his whole body seemed to be enwrapped and covered by some substance like cloth or furs.

Ned found, however, that he could breathe all right. Evidently he was not to be smothered or crushed by whatever enveloped him, for he could feel that, however he was being transported, his mouth was free not to call out, because of his gag, but to breathe in the air that could keep him alive. At length Ned figured it out to his partial satisfaction; he was wrapped up in silks and furs and be-

ing carried out of Tien Tsin on the back of a pack horse, bound—where?

There his reasoning and theories ended. He simply did not know who had him, a prisoner, nor whither he was bound.

How long he had been in motion he could not tell. He wondered where was his friend, the Omaha merchant, if the man really was his friend. He wondered—the wondering stopped for an instant, as a familiar sound fell on the boy's ear—the sound of an undoubted American voice.

"Halt! who goes there? Show up, Chinkie! What are you lugging off?"

The pony stopped. Then Ned had a second shock.

"All is right, gentlemen" a voice replied which he recognized at once. "I do but bear my own goods out of harm's way. See, I have a pass from one of your officers."

"Talks American, eh!" was the comment. "Let's see what the pass says: 'Pass the bearer, an American Chinaman and loyal to the allies, through the lines with his own goods. (Signed) Edward Pevear, Jr. Aid to the Admiral.' Hm! aid to what admiral? Who's giving passes anyhow?"

"Everybody, I reckon," came the reply from a comrade. "You did, I did, this fellow did. Great Scott! every blamed man of the allies has set up for

provost-marshal. What else you goin' to do when these Chinks come round you, kissing the ground and givin' ye stuff you wouldn't dare to eat if you was a-starving. They're all good friends now, you know."

"But do we let this Yankee Chinky through the lines, boys?" queried the sentry. "Who's this Edward Pevear—junior—anyhow? Do any of you fellers know him?"

"Sure," came the answer. "Why, you know the kid, Thompson. He's that plucky little chap that came in with Marshall of the Marines, and was with Seymour on his relief that didn't relieve. Cheeky kid, but true blue, that's what Ned Pevear is. He was on the firing line or carrying messages all day yesterday. O yes, he's aid to the Admiral all right, even if Seymour has gone back to the fleet."

"All right, let the Chinaman go through. Drive on, Johnny. What you got in your packs, anyhow?"

"Silks and furs, sir, saved from my burning warehouse," was the reply. "I am near to ruin by these Boxers and these Russian plunderers. Let me save what I can, I pray you."

"Gorry! talks American like a native, don't he? Those fellers are scarcer'n hen's teeth. He'd make a dandy interpreter. Better stay with us, Johnny. We'll give you a job. No? Can't? All right, all right. Push on with your pack horses. I guess you're O. K."

And the pony began to move again.

Swathed in silks and furs, bound tightly in his pack, Ned Pevear lay in a fever of anxiety, struggling in vain to let his comrades know that an American prisoner lay concealed in that bale of loot. He knew the truth now. The Omaha merchant was but a false friend. He had decoyed the American lad into the viceroy's treasure house to capture and bear him off to the insurgent Boxers who would give him something worse than the cangue, something more to be feared than bastinado or imprisonment. He was being stolen out of the camp of the allies to torture and death, betrayed by this false Chinaman.

He struggled, but to no purpose; he tried in vain to shout and call for release; his limbs were too tightly bound; his mouth was too securely gagged; work and strain as he might he could do nothing and, limp and exhausted with his exertions, sweating from anxiety and vain efforts to free himself he felt himself moving away from his last hope of rescue, and, overcome and undone by the terror of his situation, the poor boy actually swooned away.

When, at last, he recovered consciousness, he felt himself still moving on. At last, the pony on whose back he was packed stopped again, and Ned could hear the tap of water as it rippled against the river bank or the sides of some sort of vessel. Then he felt himself lifted from the pony's back and trans-

ferred to the deck of the river-boat, if such it was, while all about him the only speech he heard was that of his enemies the Chinese. He felt a motion of a new sort, and knew that the junk or river-boat to which he had been transferred was being poled up some canal or river—" en route to the Boxers," he decided.

Again hunger, weakness and anxiety overcame him and once more he fell into a heavy sleep.

" Queer that I should want to sleep so much," Ned said to himself, as his waking moments would now and then return. " I'm not such a sleepy head as all that. I wonder what makes me. I suppose I'm all played out, or, else—Great Scott! that's what it is; that blamed Chink of a traitor has drugged me, so as to keep me still." And off he would float again to the land of troubled dreams.

Once or twice the wrappings would be loosened, the thongs that bound him would be eased, the gag would be removed and he could feel that he was being fed with rice and tea. At first he would try to resist. " Perhaps they're poisoning me," he thought, and then he would try to call out or shout his protests in vigorous American; but only the jabber of Chinese jargon and determined looks from unfamiliar faces greeted his words, and again he would be " packed in his bale of loot," as he declared, and quickly fall into sleep again.

So the journey proceeded; how long the time was Ned could not tell; it seemed to him he had always been going on in this way; he lost track of time; hours, days or weeks, he could not tell which, had been passing over him; he was nothing but merchandise, bound, he knew not to what market or to what fate. As, afterwards, he recalled that nightmare journey, he always felt it to be a wonder that he did not go crazy.

But it takes a good deal to turn the brain or unsettle the reason of a healthy boy; so Ned neither went crazy nor died from imprisonment and exhaustion. Instead, he grew somewhat used to his strange position, cramped and bound though he was, and, as little by little his bonds were eased or loosened, he found himself able to move his arms and legs a bit, and he knew his captors did not mean to let him die on the journey, but were keeping him alive for something—for what? he wondered.

At last there came a day—or an hour—Ned could not say which—when the boat stopped and was apparently tied to the bank. And then the bale, of which Ned was a part was handed from the boat, run ashore in a cart or wheelbarrow, he could not say which, and the next instant lifted in air and placed on something "soft and squashy," so the boy declared. Other bales seemed hoisted beside him and then at a word, evidently of command, the "soft and

squashy" thing, whatever it was, rose slowly and unsteadily into the air and began moving off with a slow, lumbering, stumbling, swinging, sea-sick sort of motion over a broken and humpy road.

"What under the sun am I up against now, I wonder?" was Ned's thought. "I'm not on a boat because the thing goes with a stomp or a sort of a slide. It isn't a horse, I know from the feel; it isn't a litter or a cart because it is soft and yielding and it's got legs. It isn't—by George! I know," he gave a start as he lay inside his bundle, as the explanation came to him, "I'm up on a camel. I'm part of a caravan, and they're carrying me off into Thibet or Tartary or the land of the Great Mogul. Great Scott! where am I to end, I wonder?"

It was of no use for him to wonder, though of course he couldn't help it. On and on the great, ungainly beast that bore him, went with the noiseless tread and sulky grunt that is the way of all camels. Then the beast seemed to turn aside from the direction he had been taking, and a sensation of shadow and overhanging walls, that he felt, but could not see, a babel of sound and speech, a beating of drums and the boom of cannon mingled confusedly in the boy's ears.

The caravan, at least Ned's one camel of it, stood still for what seemed to him an age, within the shadow of the wall or gate—Ned could not decide

which it was—while all about him the babel of excited speech and the distant sounds of war went on. Several times rough and inquisitive hands were laid upon the bale in which he lay, tightly bound and gagged again, and once he thought he was to be hauled down. But, so it seemed to him, one of his companion bales was unloaded and then after an interval hoisted again to the camel's back and Ned's sharpened intelligence concluded that the camel's load had been investigated and examined.

"Well! I've passed the custom house, I guess," the lad decided. "I wonder what class of goods I come under and what the duty on me is. Duty? Um! a fine way this to do your duty, Ned Pevear. Trussed up like a turkey on a camel's back, and bound, heaven knows where!"

Along a narrow street, through a renewed babel of sounds and through such a confusion of strange and vile and awful smells that Ned was glad to bury his nose in the goods that formed his pillow, the camel went on. Then the lad knew he had turned into a narrower street and when at last the beast on which he rode came to a sudden halt, somehow, so Ned felt, he had come to the end of his journey.

"Now, then, to see what we shall see," he said to himself. "Great Scott! if they'll only untie me and let me stretch myself and breathe just once like a Christian, I don't care how soon they kill me."

The camel knelt down to be unloaded; there was an untying of cords and Ned could feel the bale or bundle next him slip into the lifting arms of the warehousemen.

"My turn next," he said, and then his heart almost stopped beating; for something happened.

The firing of the great guns, into the sound of which he had come, had slackened a bit as he waited to be unloaded; then it seemed to redouble; then there came a nearer, sharper sound—the crack of rifles and small arms, an enraged jumble of Chinese shouts and cries, the shuffling, hurrying noise of countless slippered feet, the tramp of heavy boots such as Chinamen never wore, coming at double quick; a mass of flying, crowding, desperate men seemed to swarm into and choke the narrow street, so that the kneeling camel was well-nigh overwhelmed, and Ned thanked his lucky stars that his bale was not the main one just then, as scores of human forms seemed leaping over the poor camel, who still knelt, trampled upon, used as a stepping stone, grunting and squealing its fear and protest but unable to move, for the press.

Then the tide of retreat passed over; the tramp of heavy feet came nearer, and as the outraged camel staggered to its feet, almost bellowing in its rage, above all rose a sound that brought wonder, fear and joy to the ears of the poor lad still trussed on the

shaking camel. It was a rousing, ringing, victorious British cheer.

"Keep it up, boys! keep at it!" Ned could hear the shout of command. "Into 'em once more. Give 'em cold steel! Charge! Charge! Charge!"

Then the bayonet charge passed over him and he seemed quite alone.

Fear overmastered his joy.

"O no! no! they cannot, they must not pass me. That would be too cruel," he thought. He thought, for he could not speak this fear. The gag was too firmly fixed in his mouth; the bonds held him too closely imprisoned.

"O God! do not let them pass me by! Let them find me; let them find me!" his heart shaped the prayer his lips could not utter. "Thank God! the relief has come. The allies are in Pekin."

Gratefulness took the place of fear, and then as the shouting died in the distance and he was alone, fear again succeeded to gratitude.

A crowd of slippered feet came surging down the narrow street. A shrill chorus of delighted Chinese cries filled the air, as the thieving fringe of battle swooped down upon the deserted camel and the bale of loot. Ned felt his bale rudely pulled from the camel's back and a dozen despoiling hands tug at the string. Was he, after all, to fall into the hands of native thieves and murderers?

Again the tramp of heavy boots came to his ears; the charge was over; the soldiers were coming back. Ned could hear the shouts and calls and laughter of the returning force. Oh! would they not get to his side before the looters got away?

It seemed impossible; but at sight of the terrible foreign devils who had charged so furiously against their brothers, filling the street, the looters turned to scurry off; some, however, not willing to leave good spoil picked up the bale that contained the suffering Ned Pevear and would have dragged it away.

"Loot! loot!" came the English cry. "Drop that, drop that bundle you bloomin' Chinks, or we'll drop you!"

Desperately the Chinese thieves struggled to drag off their spoil. There came the sharp crack of a pistol, another, and yet another, and Ned felt himself drop heavily to the ground, while across him and his "pack" fell a heavy, lifeless body. The spoiler had been stopped.

"'Ere you are boys! a prize, a prize. Get off with the loot. Open up and see what's it. Smithers, you bloomin' old swab, 'ang me, if you didn't snipe that camel. Wot'd ye kill him for? 'E's no Boxer. Open up, Jack. Let's see what we've got 'ere."

"Fall in men, fall in! we've no time to waste here," came the command of an officer. "Those fel-

lows will get back at us before we can make the gate. Fall in, I say. Drop the loot."

"Not if we know it, Jack, we won't," one of the looters grumbled. "Got to have a little fun out o' this. 'Ang these cords! they won't break. Cut 'em, Jack. Cut 'em, I say, 'fore the leftenant stops us. There you be. My hye! silks, furs,—Ei! By the great—wot's this? A dead man. No! 'e's alive; and a white man tied up and gagged. Ho, 'ei, leftenant! Look a 'ere, sir. See wot's 'ere. It's a white man—a Britisher, eh? tied up in the bale and trussed up for torture."

"Cut his ropes! Pull out his gag!" the young lieutenant ordered as he led a crowd of men to "Jack's find."

Too stiff to move; weakened and wearied by his long confinement and his horrible experiences, Ned Pevear could neither stand nor speak for an instant. He lay back, stiff, sore, silent. Then, as he caught the gleam of friendly eyes and heard the blessed sound of English speech, he said feebly:

"Thank you, boys. Where am I? Who are you. Are the allies in Pekin?"

"No, but you are, lad," the lieutenant said. "Who are you? Hark! they're forming again. Pick him up, boys; rush him back till we come up to the litters. No time to explain now. Handle him easy.

My eye! lad, but you must have had an experience. Fall in, men; double quick back to the gates. We don't want those Boxers to get between us and safety."

A big marine picked up Ned and, carrying him in his arms, joined the double quick of his comrades up and out of the street.

Dazed and dull still, Ned could only feel that somehow he was saved and he shut his eyes as his carrier sped with him to safety. Up the street and across an open devastated place, swept by fire and destruction the marines hurried, and soon Ned was dropped from the big fellow's strong arms to a litter which two bearers lifted and sped away toward what Ned through half opened eyes saw to be a frowning wall, lined with soldiers and civilians armed with rifles and hurrahing loudly.

The big marine still trotted by the side of the litter.

"Who are you fellows?" Ned cried to the marine, curiosity getting the better of exhaustion. "And what are you doing?"

"We're marines from the legations—British Yankees, Dutchmen and Japs," the marine answered as he ran. "Cap'n Myers, 'e made a great charge and now we're hiking back to the legations. Mighty good thing for you we did, lad. Lord knows where you'd been now if it hadn't a been for us."

"The legations! Then you're alive," Ned still found strength to exclaim.

"Alive, lad!" laughed the marine. "Ay, we are that; and kicking, too, as we showed the Chinks today. They haven't got at us yet behind these five-foot walls and 'anged if we're goin' to let 'em. So, brace up, lad and be one of us," he added with an encouraging look at Ned. "A chap as comes wropped up in parcels like you ought to have some bloomin' good to him when he gets untied. Horse flesh and kitty prog 'll make a man of you.

The Compound gate swung open for the returning defenders who by a daring sortie and a vigorous charge had scattered the howling besiegers of the foreign legations. Few had been hurt in the action and the litters that had been sent out to meet them came back almost free from the grim burden of the battle field.

So when Ned Pevear's litter came through the gate a curious throng surrounded it. There were faces of seven nationalities in the crowd—ladies and gentlemen, children and Chinamen, missionaries and marines, defenders and defended, and the one question was "Who was wounded?"

The lieutenant in command of the detachment that had brought in the litter saluted his superior.

"A white man, sir," he reported. "My men found him gagged and bound, tied up in a bale of

merchandise on a camel's back. I haven't questioned him yet; he's pretty weak. I don't know what he was doing in that bale of goods, but he looks to me like an American marine or soldier. He wears the blue and khaki."

Ned tried to rouse himself to explain. He sought to lift his head and carry his hand to the salute, but he could scarcely do more than make the attempt.

"Yes—American," he said. "Smuggled—Chinamen. Aid to the Admiral and Captain M—"

A glad cry of recognition and a half hurrah rang out as a young Britisher sprang to the side of the litter.

"My hat! but it is—it's Ned Pevear! Great whirligigs! but where did you tumble from, lad? I thought you were done for when we lost you on the river, and here you are—not done for yet, I hope. My eye! but isn't this great."

And, with tears in his eyes in spite of himself, Tom Dickson knelt beside the litter and fairly flung his arms about his friend.

But Ned gave no reply. His strength had gone, and even as he sought to raise his hand in welcome he swooned away again.

CHAPTER XI

"WHEN I SAY 'GO!' GO, EVERY ONE OF YOU"

KIND hearts and careful nursing brought Ned Pevear around all right, and before two days were over he had recovered sufficiently to tell his story.

Tom Dickson was his constant visitor whenever relief from his duties permitted and the two young fellows exchanged experiences and swapped stories, until their material was well-nigh exhausted. But compare notes as they might they inevitably ran up against the same baffling query: Why did the Omaha merchant kidnap Ned Pevear?

Ned found that his uncomfortable journey by pony, boat and camel instead of being three months as he imagined had been but three days; but he declared that three days packed in a bale of merchandise was equal to three years of good healthy breathing and freedom.

"That is what we are thinking here, my boy," said the American minister who had come to inquire into the condition of the "mysterious visitor" of the legations. "We have a fortified compound here

of nearly six hundred yards square; but with all these yellow gentlemen howling and firing about us, even six hundred yards square are as confining and exasperating a limit as was your bale of silk and fur."

"But we heard that you were all dead, sir," Ned remarked. "Why, the news came as straight as anything, and when we were shut up in Tien Tsin fighting to get out to you, I tell you the news just took the heart out of us for anything but revenge."

"Relief is better than revenge, my son," the American minister replied, "and I am glad to assure you that this 'via Shanghai' news is mostly lies. But lies hurt almost as much as truth when anxious friends are waiting on the telegraph ten thousand miles away. But there is no use in disguising the truth. We are in desperate straits here unless relief comes soon; and we must get word somehow to the allies in Tien Tsin that unless relief does come speedily, these yellow villains will break through the walls or tire us all beyond the strength for resistance; and then a thousand foreigners and twice that number of native Christians will be at their mercy."

"Here am I," said Ned, raising himself to look the American minister in the eye. "If you want a messenger, take me! I came to you against my will; I will go back—I'll try to get back," he corrected himself—"by my own will and as a bearer of your message."

The minister grasped the boy's hand, with moistened eyes.

"You're a brave young fellow, Pevear," he said, "but I fear the risk is too great. Our messenger must be a Chinaman, to avoid suspicion. But I thank you all the same. We all thank you. Now, get stronger as soon as possible for we shall need the strength of every sturdy comrade to hold these wretches at bay until relief comes to us. Five hundred men are not enough to defend two thousand yards of wall against which an army of fanatics are hurling shot, shell and cries of vengeance, and trying every day to roast us out with fire."

"Is that really all you have to fight off the Chinks, Tom—just five hundred men?" Ned queried, after the American minister had left them.

"That's about right," Tom replied. "You see there are about nine hundred foreigners in the compound—American, British, Japanese, Russian, German, French and Spanish—not counting the native Christian refugees. More than three hundred of us are women and children, a lot of 'em are non-combatants and four hundred are marines, from the allied fleets; add to these four hundred and the hundred from the legation people, like you and me, Ned, good fighters, eh? and you get not many over the five hundred your minister spoke of. But, by Jove! sir, you want to remember that those five

hundred are more than equal to ten thousand Chinamen—Boxers or Imperials."

"That's so! you beat 'em back in great shape, day before yesterday when you took me out of hock," said Ned. "Were you in that sortie, Tom?"

"No," the British lad replied. "Sir Robert wouldn't let me. He kept me in my position on the wall. You see, we drove the Chinese Imperials—not the Boxers—off from that wall a week ago and we've held it ever since. If only we had big guns we'd hold it forever."

"Why, haven't you any? Can't you get some?" cried Ned. "Let's charge the Chinks and capture a few."

"My dear boy, you haven't learned distances in this big city yet," Tom replied with a laugh. "If you think a couple of hundred marines—about all we can spare for a sortie—could charge into the inner city, tumble over and drag off a few Cruesots or Krupps and get 'em in here in the face of a hundred thousand yellow boys, you're cutting out more work than even we are good for. Why, Sir Robert says—"

"Sir Robert?" broke in Ned. "Sir Robert who?"

"Why Sir Robert Hart, of course, the chief of the Imperial customs. My chief, you know. I said I was ordered to join him and I did."

Ned had already heard the story of Tom Dickson's

adventures and how he joined Sir Robert Hart in Pekin, and he concluded it was even more exciting than his own adventures, though not so mysterious.

Tom had told him how he and the German captain had clung to their Chinese disguises so carefully that they had gradually worked their way through hordes of fanatical Boxers and encampments of Imperial troops until, at last, through many dangers and out of many threatening situations, with many hair breadth escapes they had finally reached Pekin, and stealing through the muddy moat where it swung around from the water gate to the legation wall they had finally communicated with the sentries on the wall and been pulled up by rope in the night, while the besiegers were peppering the legationers with shot and shell. It was all very exciting, but as Tom declared, it was easy enough when you made up your mind to do it.

"These Chinamen are worse shots than the Spaniards were at Santiago," he declared. And Tom knew; for if you recall his story "In Defence of the Flag," you will remember that he and Don Martin, his American friend, were both at Santiago, on ship and shore. "Those yellow boys yonder" he added, "haven't used many of their big guns yet. They're such bloomin' bad shots, don't you know, that they don't dare to try more than their light artillery. Most of their shots go over us, anyhow, and as they

never hit twice in the same place they can't do us much harm. I'll bet a cookie that they've killed more of their own men than they have of ours. They're great at burning things, and that's where most of our danger lies. We have to fight fire most of the time. I fancy, old chap, that when you get on your legs again, they'll put you in the fire brigade until you get your fighting strength back."

Tom's prophecy proved true. For when, in a few days, by careful nursing and proper care, the young American "got on his legs again," Ned, in answer to his demand for active service, was first put into the "bucket brigade" and with men, women and children of every nation and from every rank in life, stood in the long line from the well to the wall passing buckets to put out the fire that threatened the legation houses from the buildings the Chinese had fired outside the legation wall.

This however was extra service, and as soon after as his strength had fully returned, Ned Pevear reported to the British minister who had been made commander in chief of the legation "forces" and demanded to be counted as an able-bodied man, ready for active service.

The commander turned the lad over, for orders, to the secretary of the American legation, who was his Chief of Staff, and when Mr. Squiers learned that Ned had been with the marines he told him to report

to Captain Myers, of the American marines for orders.

Captain Myers, in turn, told the lad to join the fortification gang, which was in charge of a brave, clear-headed and plucky Methodist missionary, and under Mr. Gamewell's direction, Ned was soon working hard at strengthening the legation barricades with the sand bags made by the women helpers from their own curtains and draperies and from the very silks and rich stuffs which, on the day of the sortie that saved Ned Pevear, had been captured from the establishments of the Chinese merchants in the native city.

And among the silk sand-bag makers, working with true Dutch persistency and neatness, Ned discovered his girl friend of Manila days, the yung-vrouw Verbockhoven, to rescue whom he had risked capture and death when he tried to get from Tien Tsin to Pekin in Chinese disguise—and failed.

"It is a sad waste of precious stuffs, is it not, Mynheer Pevear?" the girl said, as from embroidered fabrics, rich enough for the dower of an empress, she was cutting and sewing bags intended to be filled with sand and flung against a wall. "But then, what would you have? Cheaper material is not at hand and this splendid silk costs nothing but an effort—and the risk of brave men's lives," she added, sadly.

"Talking of brave men, yungvrouw," said Ned, "do you see much of Captain Ullman who first told me you were here?"

"Ah! the German captain? Surely," the girl replied. "He has known my father in Manila and here in Pekin, and to him he came direct when he and the brave young English lad, your friend, were drawn over the wall. Ah, yes! he is brave. And true, even though he once fought among the Chinese. He is now in charge of the guard yonder, in the mandarin's palace which holds the Christian Chinese. He knows their language so well and is of excellent service there, my father says. But ah! what a life it is here! Constant shooting and always dread of fire by day and by night. Do you not think that speedily we may be relieved, Mynheer Pevear?"

"The allies are coming, sure," Ned replied. "They have Tien Tsin; soon they will have the men, and I know they'll fight their way through though a million Boxers stood in the path."

"Ach, so! They are coming," the Dutch girl acknowledged. "But when? Soon we shall be starved so that we can fight no more. And what then? And I like not steaks of horse flesh and stew of mule, do you?"

"A soldier must call all things good that go for food, from pate de fois gras to saddle straps," Ned

replied with a laugh. "But saddle straps would be but poor eating for young ladies," he added. "I will see to it that I eat them before you do."

"Nay, nay, good friend," the girl replied with spirit. "We women are to be soldiers, too, here, of some sort, and what you who defend us eat we surely can take without grumbling. There! I have sewn a dozen great bags; and here are yet more that Mam'selle Therese has made. Take them for us to the sand pile, Mynheer Pevear, since that is your duty and we will have more ready ere long."

And Ned with his burden of beautiful stuffs made into bags saluted the ladies and hurried to the sand heaps near the walls where Chinese converts and refugees were filling the bags with sand and carrying them as additional defences to the endangered wall, which was thus padded out from three feet of masonry to five of stone and silk and sand.

That day the Chinese besiegers increased their artillery fire and kept it up so vigorously and with such improved marksmanship that, twice, the defenders were driven from the wall, and when they returned, they saw with dismay that the Chinese in force had rushed the outlying defences and held a barricade that commanded the legation wall.

A council of war was held.

"Ah! if we only had cannon," said the British minister, "we could hold that barricade ourselves.

Not having them we must set our sharpshooters to work, or—"

"Or capture the barricade," Captain Myers cried. "Have I your excellency's permission to attempt it?"

"At a sacrifice of lives needed for our defence here?" queried the commander. "I fear, Captain, it will be attempted at too great a cost. But, if it must be tried—" he paused.

"It must, sir," the plucky captain of marines said, completing the minister's sentence. "I will risk but few lives, sir. If you will support my charge I'll call for volunteers among my marines and rush 'em off."

Consent was given, reluctantly, but as a forlorn hope, and Captain Myers was soon among his men.

The whole sixty volunteered. And Ned Pevear was one of them.

"Support me from the wall," was Captain Myers's last word to his fellow defenders, as he marshalled his men at the South Gate.

Sixty determined men stood behind the gate. It looked an insignificant force to face a host.

"Boys," the captain said, "that barricade must be cleared, or our defences are in danger. When I say 'go!' go, every one of you! Over there in the British legation three hundred women and children are waiting and praying for you and your success. Remember, their lives depend upon our success. For,

as surely as you stand here, if we shirk or if we fail, not only our lives but theirs are lost. And you know what that means when these Chinese fiends lay hands upon them. Now then! for the women and children! Are you ready? Go!"

The gate swung open and go these gallant sixty did! Out through the gate, on through the smoking ruins of burning buildings, on, in a gallant dash, the forlorn hope charged with shout and yell and rifle shot.

The Chinaman has never yet stood before the American charge, even when protected by barricade or wall. As the marines swept on, a few shots from the barricade greeted them, but the fire was uncertain.

In the forefront of the charge, yelling as he had yelled with such fear-compelling results when he had charged the unstable Filipinos when Lawton urged him on, raced Ned Pevear, his eye aflame with the enthusiasm of effort, his heart bent upon the defence of the women in the compound—especially the yungvrouw Lizbet.

Up to the barricade, through it, over it, anyway to circumvent it the handful of Americans cleared and captured it, while before them, like a flock of frightened sheep, the Chinese mob that had held the barricade ran for dear life.

The path of retreat was, however, strewn with

those who had fallen in the charge, victim of bayonet, sword and rifle shot.

"No quarter!" was the word passed among the grimly determined marines; for they knew from experience and a study of Chinese character that leniency is esteemed weakness by those sentiment-lacking Mongolians and failure to kill was considered fear.

But Ned was not yet brought up to what he called the "cold blood" standard; to deliberately shoot or cut down a "kotowing" Chinaman pleading for mercy was more than he was hardened to. But when he saw a man thus spared by him deliberately plunge a spear into Captain Myers, the brave leader of the charge, his rage was a real and righteous one and, as the captain fell, Ned sprang at the assassin with loaded pistol.

But before he could act as the avenger another had been before him, and as one wounded Chinaman shot down the other and revenged the cowardly spear-thrust Ned gave a mingled cry of approval, balked vengeance and surprise as in the wounded Chinaman who had thus summarily punished the Boxer assassin, he recognized his old acquaintance, the Omaha merchant.

Instinctively he turned his levelled pistol away from this man who had been—he was not sure whether friend or foe, benefactor or betrayer. He

knelt beside the wounded man, one eye fixed on the smiling face, the other looking cautiously and suspiciously at the still smoking revolver.

"Great Scott, man!" he cried, "Is it you? and here, fighting in the Boxer ranks? I don't know whether to kill you or claim you."

"Claim me as a friend, O my brother," said the wounded merchant. "I am with the Boxers, but not of them. I sought for parley at your gates and entrance as a friend, and behold! I was caught in your charge and the swift retreat and am hurt by the guns of my friends and brothers—the Americans."

"Um!" said Ned, still suspicious and hesitating. "Nice sort of a friend you are, to kidnap and hustle me away from my own people and rush me like a bale of goods into this hot bed of Boxer power and villainy. No thanks to you, I am alive; and I'm not sure but you should die as a traitor. Give me your pistol. I think I'll carry you back as a prisoner and let someone else be judge and jury. I'm not up to that, I reckon."

"To you I will trust myself, O friend," the merchant replied. "I can explain all; but see, I am hurt in the leg; who will bear me into the allied camp?"

"I'll see to that," Ned replied, though he questioned his ability to pick up this portly Chinaman and bear him alone into the compound. "Hullo! Mitch-

ell!" he cried, as one of the gunners of the *Newark* came back from the victorious charge. "I've got a find here. Will you help me get him into camp."

"Oh! it's you, young 'un, eh?" gunner Mitchell replied. "What are you trying to do—save that bloody Chink's miserable life? Better put an end to it."

"No, no," Ned replied, pushing aside the threatening bayonet. "He knows too much to kill just now, and he saved my life twice, although he did play a low-down trick on me. I've got to investigate him. He's an American Chinaman and I want to get him inside the walls where I can figure his case out. Will you help me?"

"O, I suppose so," the gunner agreed with a grumble; "though hanged if I see what's the good. Here come the litter bearers for the captain and our other wounded boys. It's lucky there are so few of them; if the cap'n dies it'll take more Chinks than are in China to pay for his loss."

"But this man shot down the fellow who speared Cap'n Myers," Ned explained, "and he may be all right. Anyway, he's right enough not to kill just yet."

Then with the gunner's help he lifted the Omaha merchant from the ground and the two, borrowing a vacant litter bore the "mystery," as Ned called him, through the gates, where, once again, an enthusiastic

and welcoming throng hailed the return of the victorious marines, and mourned over the wounded captain whose valor had saved them from Chinese vengeance.

"I bagged a pile of Chinese powder, lad," the gunner told Ned as they returned from the charge. "I'll send some of our Christian refugees out for it. It's good for big guns, if we only had one. I wish I had corralled a Chinese piece, but they hadn't mounted any on the barricade; we were too quick for them."

"Will my American friends accept my help?" asked the wounded man on the litter "I know of an old cannon hid away in the Concession and if it is still there, it may be made of use by American skill."

"You do!" exclaimed the gunner. "By George! Chinky, if you'll roust that out for me I'll help save your life from the ferocious chap here that captured you. Trot him in, young 'un. I want to find that gun."

Then they entered the acclaiming compound, and shared the merited plaudits for the heroes who had driven off a host.

"My hat! old man," cried Tom Dickson, enthusiastically. "Why didn't I have a chance at that charge, too? There's more glory in that than sniping at bloomin' Chinamen from the top of a wall. Great work that was. We can hold that barricade

clear now, don't you know, for our rifles will reach as far as any of their cannon and they won't dare to mount 'em there while we've got the rifle range and can pot 'em whenever they try to sneak in."

"Ah! but it is brave that you are, mynheer," the pretty yungvrouw Verbockhoven said, as, with both hands extended, she greeted the returning hero. "It is proud we are of our Americans—and of you," she said with an old-time courtesy. "My father says it was the bravest action of the siege."

"No braver than the pluck and courage of you girls and women," Ned replied. "A charge is exciting, but it's easy where everyone rushes together and the excitement braces you up. But there's no excitement in making sand bags and wondering all the time what's happening outside the walls. I tell you it takes more pluck to be patient and brave as you are, than to snipe Chinamen or swing out into a charge. *Place aux dames!* say I."

And Tom Dickson, listening to his friend, saluted the young Dutch girl and slapped Ned on the back.

"Right you are, old chap," he cried; "right you are, every time."

Then Ned told about his capture of the Omaha merchant—"if it was a capture," he said; "hanged if I know what to make of him."

"I'd make mince meat of him if I were you, the sneaking renegade," cried Tom vindictively.

"I don't know as I want to," Ned said reflectively. "He might have done that to me more than once and he didn't. I'm going to get the truth out of him, sometime. He may be just another Captain Ullman, Tom. We thought he was a renegade, too, you know, and now we know he's—"

"Sir Robert's compliments, sir," an English blue jacket broke in, as he hailed Tom Dickson with a salute. "He says there's a man in the hospital asking for you; badly wounded, sir. You're to go at once."

"By Jove! not one of our custom's men, I hope," said Tom. "Who is it, messenger? Do you know?"

"It's that German captain who came in with you, sir," the jackie replied; "he's been over to the palace, you know, protecting the Christian Chinkies."

"Ullman!" exclaimed both the English and American boys.

"My hat! but that's too bad," cried Tom. "Come over with me and see what's the matter, Ned. Poor old Ullman."

And making their adieus to the anxious Dutch girl the two lads rushed to the hospital.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE BRIDGE

THEY found the German captain in the hospital, badly though not dangerously wounded. He had been struck down, so the sisters explained, as he ran along the wall to try to prevent a Norwegian who had gone crazy from leaping the wall. But the Chinese bullet had met the German before he could stay the Norwegian, and even as the German fell wounded the insane refugee had leaped from the wall.

"He was one of our engineers, this Norwegian," Captain Ullman exclaimed as Tom Dickson came to his cot, "and he is not too crazy to be the fool; he knows why the Chinese shots do us not much of the damage—that they fire too high—and if he once tells them the truth they will find the more dangerous range. He must be stopped, Herr Tom, if we would be safe from bombardment here; he must—ach, himmel! who is it with you? Not mein lieber Ned—not the Herr Pevear? No, it is? So! Art risen from the dead then, my friend? How came you here?"

Ned grasped his old time captive's hands and briefly told his story, explaining why he had not yet

been able to hunt Ullman out at the palace on the Wu and expressing his sorrow at his wound.

"Ach, this? It is nothing, nothing, believe me, if but I can stop that crazy Norwegian's raving. But how—how?"

"Why, Cap'n," said Ned with a laugh, inclined to brighten up the German's spirits, "I don't see but Tom or I will have to drop over and visit the Chin-Chins in their line. We've done it you know—as Chinamen."

But the matter was too vital for a joke and the captain did not appreciate the pleasantry. He took Ned's remark seriously.

"Ah, so" he mused, "but how; but how, Herr Ned? If you were but dumb now! But your tongue will ever get the best of your disguises; and even Herr Tom here is of little value in such a matter unless I be with him."

Tom laughed in his turn. The German's egotism was too unconscious to do more than amuse.

"I fancy we'll have to let the matter go as it is, Cap'n," he said. "One crazy man over the wall is enough; if Ned or I should go there'd just be one or two more crazy fellows to be anxious about. Let things stay as they are; we shall see what we shall see."

"Yes, but what shall you see, my friend?" the German replied. "You shall see slaughter and cap-

ture by these yellow fiends, whom I know only too well. And what have we here to repel them? Nothing—simply nothing, I say. Only one Colt and one Nordenfelt; but what are two guns against the Chinese armament. And to-day they have trained a new great gun on the Wu from the Imperial wall. Thus are we surrounded and nothing can be done."

"On the Imperial wall, eh?" cried Ned, remembering the American gunner's wish and the Omaha merchant's suggestion. "Good-by, Cap'n Ullman. I want to look into that. Get better, quick. I'll see you again."

He was speedily running across the compound to where his Chinese friend was housed in the American legation.

"How are you feeling?" Ned inquired.

"Better, much better, thanks to you, O brother," the American Chinaman replied. "I shall walk with ease to-morrow, I know it."

"But I want you to-day," declared Ned. "If we got you into a 'rickshaw, could you ride over to that place where you said there was an old gun, do you think?"

"And why not? I will. Try me," the Chinaman replied.

Ned sought the marine barracks and hauled Mitchell the gunner away from his infrequent siesta. He told the gunner of the Omaha merchant's inclina-

tion, and before long, they were trundling a confiscated jinricksha to the legation doors, and lifting their Chinese friend within the vehicle, followed his direction and came at last to the junk shop near the yamen.

"It was here last year," the merchant said, "as I was searching for curios to send to my American customers, that I came upon an old cannon of Engglish make. Some time, thought I, there may be a customer for this and I bade the junk merchant secrete it for me. Look you, O friends, under yonder pile of rubbish, beneath that old wheel, and that pile of sand. That's it; there is the breach; unearth it and see if I spoke not the truth."

He certainly did. Beneath the rubbish and sand, Ned and the gunner unearthed and soon dragged to sight an old breach-loading cannon of English make; 1860 was the mark upon it, and it looked odd enough to those used to modern guns of advanced pattern.

"Kind of ancient history, eh lad?" the gunner said. "Well, as the feller says in the play 'it ain't as big as a house or as wide as a barn door, but it'll do.'"

"Of course it will," said Ned, "and if it won't you can make it do," he added with perfect faith in American ability and ingenuity. "And it's thanks to our friend Mr. Wong Lee, eh, Mitchell?"—this

with a nod toward the Omaha merchant—" if it hadn't been for him we shouldn't have had even this historic relic."

" Right you are, lad. Wong, put it there!" and the marine extended a hand to the Chinaman. " You're a white man even if you are yellow. You did us proud. And now, if you'll just stay where you are while Ned and I run this anty diluvian aboard your 'rickshaw, we'll have it fixed in a jiffy."

With the help of Ned and a half dozen Chinese " converts " the gun was hoisted aboard the 'rickshaw and trundled over to the American legation. There, Mitchell the gunner with the help of other artillerists tinkered away upon it and its " international " mount and finally produced an effective and practical addition to the small armament of the legations. And the boys christened her " Betsey."

Meantime, Ned and Tom had consulted about Captain Ullman's fear as to the revelations of the escaped Norwegian lunatic. Tom was still inclined to treat it as something that could not be remedied while Ned feared that the German's anxiety was well founded.

" Don't be afraid, Ned," Tom Dickson declared. " No white man could get among those Boxers and live. That Norwegian is dead, I'll bet on that."

" But did you hear what Mr. Squiers reported?" queried Ned. " He says the firing of the Chinese is

more accurate, and as you saw for yourself seven shells from the Chinese guns fell inside our walls to-day. They've got our range, I tell you."

"All right old chap, and we've got their's," replied Tom. "You wait till Mitchell gets your 'Betsey' trained on them. She kicks like a mule, but she's knocked down that barricade in the college grounds already, and to-morrow Mitchell's going to train her on that big gun on the Imperial wall. We'll give 'em as good as they send. 'Betsey' forever!"

Ned was still unconvinced, but just then came the call "turn out! turn out, all," and knowing that something was afoot, both lads rushed to their quarters.

"To the barricades!" came the order; "the Chinese have undermined Morrison's. Rally at the bridge and give 'em a dose if they come through."

Just then, the house which Dr. Morrison, the English correspondent, occupied within the French legation burst into flames, and as the women's bucket brigade lined up for duty, Tom sprang to his station on the wall, while Ned rallied with the marines on the bridge across the moat near the German legation.

The Germans were there in force, but when a mob of Boxer besiegers under cover of the fire made a rush into the walled street back of the German legation, the German defenders let them pass without beating them back knowing well that the Americans

on the bridge would give the assailants a warm reception.

Up the street came the Chinese rush, with flags and guns and spears yelling "kill! kill! death to the foreign devils!" They were within the compound at last.

But the American marines were ready for them. Their rifles on the moat poured out a sharp defiance and under the heavy and unexpected fire the Chinese wavered. Across the moat and into the street leaped certain of the marines, Ned Pevear among them and as the enemy turned in flight, Ned saw with delight that the Germans who had remained apparently inactive had quietly closed about the assailants and practically cut off their retreat.

"Good work! we've trapped 'em!" cried Ned, working his gun with energy and effect. A hundred, at least, of the Boxers were killed and wounded in the German-American trap and when the remnant broke through the barricades in wild confusion Ned, with his eye on a Boxer flag leaped over, too, with certain of the Germans, bound to add that flag to his trophies of war.

Alas! his excitement got the better of his caution; for when his German comrades, called away by the bugle, fell back into the compound, Ned still dashed ahead; in an instant he had closed upon the flag

bearer, cut him down, and with the captured banner leaped back for the wall and safety.

It was too late; the barricade was closed; the defenders on bridge and street had hurried back to the wall and before Ned could make a break for the gate on Legation street a fresh force of besiegers had rallied to the support of the defeated assailants and once again Ned Pevear was a prisoner in the hands of the Chinese.

"Well! I got the flag, anyhow," he said, joy over his triumph mingling with an acknowledgment of his folly in thus letting his enthusiasm get the better of his discretion, and backing up against the wall he prepared to die fighting, like a Yankee marine.

With yells and cries of vengeance the Boxers rushed against the Yankee lad at bay; but the Chinese who immediately surrounded the American turned upon the mob with stern commands and levelled guns, forcing them away from their intended victim, while their leader, an officer in uniform, held out his hands in unmistakable pantomime, emphasizing his actions with words of command which Ned could not fail to understand—a summons to surrender.

Then the lad recognized the fact that Imperial soldiers stood between him and the bloodthirsty mob and that he might yield himself with some hope of

decent treatment to the soldiers of the emperor and not to the revengeful Boxers.

With a smile and a bow Ned handed his gun and his captured banner to the Imperial officer.

"Take them; the game's your's," he said, and, to his surprise, the smiling Chinaman, as he handed the trophies to his orderly replied in words which sounded to Ned's ears like an attempt at the German "Ja wohl; sehr gut."

The boy's eye brightened.

"Sprechen sie Deutsch?" he queried.

"Ja!" replied the officer in a Chinese attempt at German that was even funnier than the American's essay.

"Then, for heaven's sake! keep me out of those Boxers' hands," cried Ned, in "American," yielding himself prisoner and pointing at the yelling mob beyond the Imperial line. "Treat me like a soldier and I'll not object."

The movement rather than the words were understood, and encircled by a cordon of soldiers and followed by a hooting, clamorous crowd, Ned Pevear was borne away from the Chinese wall and up the Customs street to the gate of the Tartar or Imperial city—a prisoner once more.

Even to the gate the mob pursued and pressed upon the Imperials, shouting for Ned's blood; but his guard hurried the lad through in safety, and

the Chinese officer assured Ned that he was under orders from the Tsung li Yamen, or Foreign office, to bring the first captured foreigner before them for examination, unharmed and instantly.

Ned gathered from the queer snatches of German which he could extract from the officer's talk that he had been one of the Chinese officers drilled under Major Reitzenstein, the German military expert who had trained the Imperial troops, and that he and some of the foreign-drilled Chinamen wished to conduct the conflict under the rules of war; but the hatred of foreigners, he explained, was too overpowering, because the most of the Imperial troops sided with the rebellious Boxers who were now almost in control of affairs in Pekin. And so at last they came to the office of the Tsung li Yamen.

But the officials who made up the Chinese Foreign office were not in the Yamen. Instead, the prisoner was hurried into the Imperial city and delivered finally at Prince Tuan's palace where, so the officer who had him in charge, assured him, the Imperial three, who were just then "running things" in China were in consultation—Prince Tuan, the Manchu chief, and the two generals Tung Fu Hsiang and Jung Lu.

And there the American lad was ushered into the presence of the chiefs of the great revolt.

"Demand to see Prince Ching," the friendly offi-

cer who had captured him had advised him. "He is your only hope."

Prince Tuan's palace was more like the headquarters of a great army then a private residence. Soldiers swarmed about it; officers and messengers were constantly coming and going and over it floated the great imperial banner of the dragon.

At once the stern, imperious and relentless Manchu, Tuan, the organizer and backbone of the Boxer revolt, questioned the prisoner in a torrent of unrecognizable and mysterious words to which Ned could only shake his head with as courteous a smile as he could command and reply in one of his few pidgin English phrases.

"No b'long my pidgin," he said (that is to say, politics are not my business.)

With an impatient toss of the head, the prince turned to those about him in inquiry. One from the throng explained the lad's answer and at a command from the prince stepped forward as interpreter.

"You are a foreign soldier—an American?" the interpreter queried.

"Yes, of the marines," Ned answered.

"And what, the great prince asks, are you doing here in our China?"

"Obeying orders," Ned replied.

"You are a captive, taken in battle. Why should not the great prince at once order your death?"

"Because he is a soldier, and soldiers who fight soldiers know how to treat captives generously," the lad replied.

"But that is no soldier who comes here to rob and slay; such are but dogs and deserve the death of dogs."

"Are our ministers, recognized by your emperor and promised his protection, dogs?" Ned boldly demanded. "I am of the American minister's guard and cannot be punished by you. I demand to see the prince Ching."

Prince Tuan grew furious at this reply, which seemed to belittle his authority. He would have ordered the bold young American to instant death, but his colleague, the more politic general Jung Lu, restrained him with courteous but calmer words.

"And we would give your chief the minister and those of other nations our protection," the prince said through the interpreter, schooling himself to milder speech; "will you, his warrior and our captive, bear our message to your minister and return here with his answer?"

"Have I the protection of the prince through the mob who would have my blood, or do I go alone?" Ned inquired.

"The great prince promises you sufficient escort. If he spares your life this day will you promise faithfully to take his message and bear the answer back?"

"And after the answer what—death?" queried the American.

"Upon the reply of your minister depends your fate," the interpreter declared. "It is for you to see that the foreigners agree to the counsels of the prince."

"I will take your message," Ned replied.

"And return the answer?"

"And if I do not?"

"Wherever you are, wherever you may be, however you may think yourself free from danger the secret ways of the Brethren of the Fist shall find you, the swift vengeance of the Fist shall punish you."

This certainly had not a pleasant sound, but Ned Pevear could enter as bold a defiance as the Boxers could frame a menace.

"The American needs no threat to hold him to his promise," he declared bravely. "What I promise I promise, and that I will do. Give me the letter to the ministers, and I will return you their answer."

"It is well. Let the foreigner be held as message bearer. We will send the letters by him and speedily."

Thus the decision of "the triumvirate" was rendered, and Ned waited their will, held as a prisoner, but also as messenger, regaled with tea and other Chinese concoctions; and, careless as to the future so long as he escaped from his present "scrape,"

he bided his time, which must also be that of the despotic Three, in the quadruple city of Pekin—the capital of the great empire.

At last the message came. It found Ned deep in attempted conversation with the foreign drilled officer who had been alike his captor and his guard. Where neither one knew German well, and each approached the language from vastly different environments conversation at best was largely a matter of signs that helped out unintelligible words; but Ned, from long experience with other tongues, was quick to understand actions, and an untranslatable word was rendered intelligible by the sign that is common to all languages. Even as the message came to him, Ned was listening to the semi-indifferent, semi-assertive declaration of the foreign drilled Chinese soldier; and this was what he made his words to mean:

"What does that matter?" the officer replied, answering Ned's query as to how it was possible for Chinese troops only partially supplied with modern arms to stand against the world and its up-to-date armaments. "If it comes to real fighting—this Boxer business is not yet the real flame of war, you know—the style or sort of arms they use will make no difference to our people. Guns or spears, the choice is as nothing then; they will do their duty with whatever weapon they have in hand. Suppose Europe—suppose what you call the world is ahead of

us in military drill and weapons, we shall always be ahead in fighting material. If you kill a hundred thousand of us, we have another hundred thousand ready. What are a million men dead? They do not mean defeat for us who have other millions to draw upon. But let us kill ten thousand of you foreigners in battle and what you falsely call the civilized world will be in mourning. If we kill a hundred thousand your boasted Powers will have to give up business and sue to us for peace."

This was what Ned gathered from the Chinaman's halting German. It set him thinking and would have called out his vigorous denial had not a palace officer and the interpreter just then come to him with the message from the prince and his generals.

"The foreigner is to take this at once to the ministers in the Chiao-min-Hsiang (Legation street) and return with their answer as soon as given. He will have escort to the barricades and a return escort with his answer, but let him swear by the tombs of his ancestors that he will go and come even as he promised."

"An American need take no oath to keep his word," Ned declared. "What he has promised that he will do. See! I am ready."

The palace officer was forced to be satisfied with his assurance, and soon Ned was taking his way

back to the legations, escorted by the very soldiers who had captured him and out of whose hands he had not expected to come alive.

With some difficulty Ned succeeded in having the truce sign recognized—the white board checkered with Chinese characters displayed on the Imperial side of the North Bridge. The allied defenders of the legations had not much confidence in these so-called truce signs of the treacherous enemy; but Ned's presence beside the truce bearer finally secured attention and admission and he was soon through the wall and welcomed within the compound as one returned from the dead.

In the beautiful palace which was occupied by the British legation and which served in the siege as chief safety point and headquarters, Ned reported to the commander and finally to the ministers.

In solemn conference they read the letter he brought them. It was a formidable looking document couched in the formal language of official correspondence and when duly translated this was what it amounted to: It regretted that the ministers and their guards denied courteous attention and reply to the white board of truce displayed at the North Bridge. The writers wished only well to the ministers and were glad to know that the ministers and their families were well. It was their desire and intention, in the name of the Emperor, to protect

the legations from the rage of the revolted Boxers who were as obnoxious to the Emperor and the Foreign office, as to the legations, and it promised, again in the name of the Emperor, to afford absolute protection to the ministers of the Foreign Powers if they would come out from the besieged legations which lay now at the mercy of the revengeful Boxers and trust in the Emperor. Let the ministers, their staffs and their families come out from Legation street by tens and without arms and they would be conducted to the well-guarded offices of the Tsung li Yamen or Foreign office and there cared for. But if they refused this and remained within the legation compound the writers could not long withhold the destroying rage of the rebellious and much regretted Boxers.

And this letter was simply signed "Prince Ching and others."

The summons was dismissed with but little debate as untrustworthy. The Diplomatic Corps mewed up in the legation compound remembered altogether too vividly the murder of their colleague, the German minister, as he proceeded, under Chinese escort, to make terms with the Foreign office. That narrow ally near the Tsung li Yamen where he fell in death was too certain a road to destruction to be desired by any foreigner.

And when they questioned Ned the messenger he returned an equally skeptical reply.

"Does it say that Prince Ching signed that letter, gentlemen?" he queried. "It is a lie. Prince Ching was not in the palace. He will have nothing to do with affairs that are managed by that bloodthirsty Prince Tuan and his advisers. I appealed to him for protection and they denied my appeal, saying Prince Ching was far away. He did not sign that paper. Tuan the assassin means to bring you out by tens and murder you. Of that I am certain, and this letter promises no protection to any in the legations save the ministers, their staffs and families. The letter is a lie, I say. It is not from Prince Ching and it is only a decoy to lead you all to death."

So the ministers believed, and they decided to pay no attention to the offer made them.

"But I must take back your answer, gentlemen," said Ned. "Will you prepare it for me and send me back?"

"Send you back? you, lad? Why, they will murder you."

"But I promised to return with your reply, gentlemen, and I must keep my word," the American declared.

"It is foolishness; it is nonsense; it means your death."

Ned shrugged his shoulders.

"It may, gentlemen, but it must be done," he said. "A promise is a promise, and surely you would not have me break faith even with these yellow heathens. How will they regard one who comes under a solemn promise, as I did, and then breaks his word? Not I alone, gentlemen, but you, too, will suffer. With or without your consent I must go back to those who sent me."

"I believe the lad is right," said Sir Robert Hart, the English mandarin and Inspector of Customs. "I honor him for his integrity. Let us not be party to a fraud. Besides, I am of the impression that the Tsung li Yamen or the leaders of this revolt have secret tidings of the coming of the relief forces and seek either to ingratiate themselves with the Powers by seeming to protect us or else to murder us all as this messenger believes and then defy the world. Let us send the lad back with a letter of courteous refusal, but with our stern assurance that any harm to the bearer of our message shall be doubly and more than doubly revenged upon those who do him ill."

"Let us send the answer as Sir Robert advises, but let some other messenger bear it—one of the Christian Chinamen in the palace on the Wu," one of the council suggested.

"No one but I can go, sir," Ned declared em-

phatically. "I said I would, and with or without your consent, I shall go."

"It is a noble resolve, young man," Sir Robert said, extending his hand to the American. "Let him bear our reply, gentlemen. His honesty will be an object lesson that these shrewd but unscrupulous foemen of ours may heed and honor. We must keep faith even with our enemies."

And, at last, reluctantly, the council yielded to Ned's decision and prepared the letter for the American to take back as he had promised to "Prince Ching and others."

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE PALACE OF PRINCE TUAN

BUT if the council of ministers decided upon Ned's return as messenger, public opinion within the compound was certainly against it.

"Go back to those bloomin' butchers? not much, Ned," declared Tom Dickson, hotly. "Not if I have to knock you down and tie you to keep you here. A promise is a promise, but one made under compulsion is not to be held as binding. Is not that so, Mynheer Verbockhoven?"

The deliberate and conservative Dutchman clasped his hands judicially over his capacious stomach.

"It is a question to be debated, my son—" he began slowly, but his daughter broke in upon his words, an unusual act for so obedient and filial a young lady.

"No, no, my father!" the yungvrouw declared, "there can be no debate in this. You surely cannot advise our brave Mynheer Ned—Mynheer Pevear," she corrected herself, "to walk straightway into the hands of those murdering Chinamen. He goes to

death, my father. I know he does." And her voice trembled perceptibly, her bright eyes filled with tears.

"Would you have me prove myself a liar, yungvrouw?" demanded Ned. "Surely, no."

And the yungvrouw Lizbet was silent.

But the Omaha merchant said "My brother is a valiant and truth-loving youth. But is there aught against one friend acting for another? I brought you into Pekin whither you wished to come. Stay you here. See, I am ready. I will bear the answer from the ministers, and spare my young brother."

The American gave both hands to the Chinaman in appreciation of his friendship.

"Is that according to Confucius?" he asked with a smile.

"Our great teacher once said," replied the Omaha merchant, "that 'the cautious cannot err.' I am cautious in this case, and what I offer to do I do cautiously. But I know it is right."

"And therefore you do not err?" said Ned.

The Dutchman nodded his head in approval of the Chinaman's resolve, while even his daughter's sad face lighted up with a smile.

"Mr. Wong, you're a brick," said Tom, following Ned's action and shaking hands with the merchant.

But the American was not to be moved.

"Somebody told me another of your Chinese sayings once," he said to the Omaha merchant. "It

went something like this 'who knows how to lie knows neither how to love nor respect his parents.' My father has often told me that to lie is cowardice and that the truth is courage. I can't go back on my training, good people. I said I would bring the answer back, and I must. That's all there is about it."

It seemed so, truly. Neither arguments, pleas nor threats could change Ned Pevear's determination to stick to his promise, and before the next day had grown to noon he passed out of the gate of the compound, and signalling the Imperial soldiers who held the devastated space beyond the Wu he gave himself into the hands of the German speaking Chinese officer who had been alike his captor and his escort.

And soon he stood again within the confines of Prince Tuan's Palace.

"Deliver your letter only to Prince Ching," the shrewd Omaha merchant had advised the lad, and through the interpreter Ned replied to the Manchu prince who held control in Pekin that he had a letter for Prince Ching, into whose hands he was commanded to deliver it.

"Let the messenger give us the writing," Prince Tuan demanded. "The Prince Ching is far away."

"Then let your illustrious Highness summon him or send me to the prince," Ned replied with all necessary adjectives. "For only to him who signed the letter can I deliver my answer."

At once the Manchu prince, whom it was so often death to cross, burst out into a rage that was known to all his trembling adherents and servants as "Prince Tuan's ch'i"—a blind, unreasoning anger.

He drew his sword and would have cut the American boy down in the heat of his rage, but the lad never shrank. Instead, he caught his breath slowly between his firmly closed lips, and drew himself up almost in defiance of the angered Manchu.

"I kept my word; let the prince keep his," he said, as the prince paused in his anger but swung his uplifted sword aloft.

"What says the dog?" demanded the prince of the interpreter, his eyes still blazing with wrath.

As the lad's words were translated, the prince strode forward as if in excess of anger at being thus braved by a foreign boy. But the sword did not fall.

Fanatic and foreign-hater though he was, Prince Tuan the Manchu was a soldier, who admired bravery and respected courage even in a foeman. With one of those sudden changes which were a part of his savage character, as a man of hasty impulses and of vigorous actions, the prince stepped back; a smile chased the flush of rage from his yellow cheeks and the man whose life had been spent in subduing the robbers and rebels of the western mountains actually subdued himself, and replaced his anger with admiration.

"It is a brave youth," he said. "Tell me, I pray, are all Americans like this?"

"You knew the General Ward, O mighty prince." was Ned's wise reply. "We are of the same blood. Americans fear a broken promise more than death."

"I pardon you. Give me the letter," said the prince.

"To the Prince Ching I deliver the letter, O prince," the American replied firmly. "If he was here to sign the message to the ministers he is here to receive their reply. To him, with you, I will deliver it."

Again the flush of wrath blazed on the Manchu's cheek, but he said nothing. Instead he pulled at his long mustache and conferred with his colleagues.

"The American is wise for his years," he said at last. "If the Prince Ching signed the letter truly the answer is for him."

He paused an instant.

"Let this messenger from the ministers be treated with all honor," he said. "He is brave, he is truthful, he is wise. O youth," he added, "the Prince Ching shall see you. Until he comes from his far place you are a guest of our palace and no harm shall come to you."

So Ned escaped the wrath of the Manchu dictator. But he kept the letter. And from general to bannerman, from interpreter to palace official and spear-

man of the guard all men marvelled at this bold, young American who had braved "Prince Tuan's ch'i" and lived to tell the tale.

Whether or not he was to live to tell the tale Ned could only conjecture. The rumor was that Prince Ching was friendly to the foreigners; but that might only be a rumor, and Ned could not be certain that his bold "bluff" in regard to the letter might not work his ruin in the end. But youth is ever sanguine, and the young American, looking only on the bright side, hoped for the best.

Others had hoped for the best in China and been disappointed. Young and old, men whose lives had been given to what they deemed the good of the strange peoples among whom they had made their homes; women who had bravely and unselfishly done what they deemed their duty toward this mighty mass of "those who sit in darkness" had been overwhelmed in the uprising of those who would not be benefited, who despised and hated these heralds and teachers of new ideas, and in spite of their hopefulness and trust had been cruelly slain by those who knew neither sympathy nor sentiment, or driven as refugees from the homes and schools they had so patiently established—powerless, penniless, deprived of all save life.

Ned Pevear did not know where was "the far place" from which Prince Ching was to be sum-

moned, but he could not see that there was anything for him to do but wait. He therefore possessed his soul in patience and, Micawber-like, waited for something to turn up.

The palace of Prince Tuan was the usual hodge podge of space and splendor, dirt and decay that are typical of Chinese architecture and aristocracy. Laid out on a grand scale and at vast expense, and then absolutely uncared for, so far as repairs and house-cleaning go, even Ned Pevear's young and strong nerves found it hard to overcome the filth sufficiently to admire the carving and coloring. Gigantic gods grinned at him from gateway and courtyard; porcelain pictures from the life of Buddha lined the walls, while eaves, angles and corners were decorated with porcelain statues of gods, men and devils, beautifully executed and always repulsive. Dirt was everywhere, from gate entrance to fish pond; and real comfort, such as an American desires, was nowhere. But from prince to coolie no one seemed to mind the profusion of one or the lack of the other, though Ned now held his breath and now his nose until he had schooled himself to endure the smells and sights that make even a Chinese palace so wondrously filthy that as Ned remembered his friend, the Hong Kong consul general, once assured him " an American would not make butter from cows stabled within the princely precincts."

To be sure there were no cows stabled there, but from the open field that was a part of the palace area Ned heard shouts and cries that told of the urging or exercising of some animals—"either ponies or coolies," he decided; he could not say which.

He was soon to know, however; for the interpreter of the prince came to him with an invitation that was almost a demand to see the prince's men ride on the racing field.

Tuan the Manchu was rough rider and athlete as well as dictator and soldier. Even while war and siege occupied his time and thought, he still found leisure for his favorite sports; so, while he waited the coming of Prince Ching, he watched the field sports in his palace area, and, as if to impress the American messenger with the prowess and agility of his retainers, he summoned the lad as a witness of the skill of his athletes and acrobats.

They certainly had skill; as wrestlers and riders they fought with ability and rode with daring.

There were boxing bouts that were a strange mixture of modern and mediæval methods; there were wrestling matches that strained cord and sinew in long-delayed overthrows and well-contested "ties"; and when, riding bareback on the fleet, vicious and tireless little mountain horses, the prince's best riders strove before their master, the prince summoned his prisoner-guest before him and, through the interpre-

ter, demanded whether the American had ever seen or taken part in such exhibitions of horsemanship or wrestling.

Born of the plains and the ranch, a major in his school battalion, the captain of his football team and champion on the cinder-path Ned Pevear did not propose to be "phased" by any Chinese athlete or rider.

"Say to his Highness that his men do splendidly," Ned replied; "but say, too, that in America we have riders and wrestlers that could beat his professionals all hollow."

"Are you one of them?" the prince demanded.

"Well, Excellency," returned Ned, modestly but impressively, "I hold prizes and have made records."

The grim face of the prince lit up with a new excitement.

"Will the American show his skill?" he demanded.

Ned drew himself up proudly.

"In our land," he returned, "it is not considered the proper thing for amateurs to contend with professionals. I am an amateur and cannot enter against these professionals."

It was a shrewd and clever method of declination, but the prince was determined.

"Will the young foreigner contend with me, down yonder?" he demanded. "I am no professional.

Let the youth prove which is most skilful—Chinese or American. I challenge him to a race or a wrestle."

This was an unexpected invitation, and Ned hesitated.

"If he fears," the prince continued, noting the lad's hesitation, "then bring one of the boys from the stable. I will match him even."

This was more than Ned Pevear could stand. He had never yet refused a challenge.

"Fear!" he cried. "I 'm not afraid of anything but treachery. If the prince will give me his word that all shall be fair and square on the field I'll meet him or any non-professional of his whole court. I never dodge a dare."

The lad's Americanisms, so far as the interpreter was able, were made clear to the prince, and this largest and strongest of all the children of Kwang the great Emperor, a born athlete and a trained lover of out door sport, flung aside his princely robe and descending to the field beckoned the American to follow him.

There was no alternative and Ned flung off his khaki jacket and his shirt and faced the Manchu, his fair skin, browned though it was by exposure to sun and wind, contrasting noticeably with the swarthy face and dark skin of the Manchu prince, darker even than most of the Manchu race.

Other contrasts were noticeable. The Manchu was muscular and hardened, inclining, however, almost to heaviness; the American, slighter in build, but of almost a man's full height, seemed outclassed by his antagonist; but his muscles were like iron, his condition as perfect as military life and out-of-door exercise could make him, while the training of gymnasium and ball field made him no mean antagonist for the soldier prince.

Each looked upon the other with a certain amount of conscious admiration, and in an instant had clenched for a wrestle. Each was handicapped by an ignorance of the other's method, but it proved after all to be but a match between brute force and educated skill, in which the latter won and, after a short but taxing struggle, Ned played his leg-thrust and ankle-lock that had so often proved too much for school-boy contestant, Filipino fighter and International soldier in friendly rivalry and the big Manchu fell heavily to earth.

He was on his feet again in an instant, discomfited but determined and with just a shade of his "ch'i" or wrath darkening his swarthy face.

"Once more! again!" he cried, fairly rushing at the American who, surprised at his own success, understood the action rather than the words and would have declined another bout.

But just then there came a blare of trumpets from

the palace gates; and an officer hastened to the field, kotowing and announcing.

The prince replied angrily to the summons and waving the officer away would have clenched again with the American, but he paused as once more the trumpet sounded and again the officer spoke. Turning, Prince Tuan snapped out a word of grudging consent.

"It is the messenger from Prince Ching," the interpreter explained to Ned, and even as he did so there came into the exercising field, a portly, well-robed and pompous official messenger, who, staying neither for ceremony or consent, strode straight to the spot where stood the disrobed and still panting contestants in the "non-professional wrestle."

"Highness," he said, and the interpreter, standing beside Ned, gave him the gist of the interview, though not the "frescoes" and compliments of Chinese communication, "the Prince Ching cannot come to the conference. It is, he says, for the Prince Tuan to come to him, sending first the foreign messenger with the letter that is for the Prince Ching. This is his right and he begs you to accord it."

"Their highnesses hate each other," the messenger interjected, in explanation; "they will have nothing to do jointly with affairs of state. I expected this, young American. Beware of the prince's anger."

The anger was rising in the Manchu breast. He faced the messenger from Prince Ching with bitter and threatening words.

"The Prince Ching is rebel and malcontent," he said; "he is friend to these foreign devils who have over-run our land and would turn us from the ways of our fathers and dishonor the tombs of our ancestors. But let him beware! I am master now and my word can bring to death even one so proud as he. He shall have neither messenger nor letter. I, as chief in command, refuse to recognize his authority to summon me. I will read this letter from the foreigners which the messenger has brought. Give it to me, American!"

Involuntarily, as the interpreter voiced the demands of the prince, Ned clapped his hand to where the pocket of his blouse should be—and struck only bare flesh. Then he remembered that his papers were left in the pocket of his blouse.

"I demand my letter, O prince," he said. "I hold your promise."

The prince turned from one who was whispering to him.

"Give the messenger his papers," he said. "Let him clothe himself once more. He shall go to the Prince Ching, not because of the prince's demand, which is as nothing to me, but because of my promise to him. But know this, O foreign youth. I know the

answer you bring. It is my gift from the gods to read through seals and paper, the hidden secrets of the letter writer. Your ministers will not do as we invited them and come within our protection. They are foreign devils who persist in their foolishness and shall die as the fool dies. I have them here"—he thrust out his open hand—"I have but to say the word and I crush them,—thus!" and he closed his hand into a clenched and crushing fist.

"As for you," he said, "you who would bring me this answer that means death to those fools yonder"—he flung his hand toward the legations—"it means death also. I can send you to the ling ch'i—the ox-knife that cuts away slowly, piece by piece. Hola!" he gave a peculiar cry and across the field came the executioner with the great "ox-eared" knife that slices a victim to slow and torture-filled death—in from twenty to one hundred cuts, according to the degree of punishment.

Ned looked at the executioner; he looked at the angry prince; he looked at the envoy from the Prince Ching—and then his heart leaped from despair to hope; for in the envoy from Prince Ching he recognized, as he had not before, his friend Wong, the Omaha merchant.

The envoy saw the boy's look of recognition and appeal and simply laid a hand on his lips. Then he addressed the Manchu tyrant.

"Mightiness!" he said. "This is open revolt against Prince Ching—the trusted adviser of the Emperor. Beware what you do. But"—he added, as he marked Tuan's rising rage, "if this foreigner must die, let it not be by ling ch'i or any of our methods. Let it be by something fitting his foreign birth and ways—something that shall show the forgiveness of your highness towards one who has striven with him in friendly wrestle."

It was a shrewd suggestion, for it turned the Manchu's impetuous and changeable nature into a new channel.

"You speak wisely, O friend of my enemy, the Prince Ching," he said. "My wrath is not against this stalwart one who has kept his promise and returned even though he knew it might be to death. See! it shall be a friendly choice. Wrestle once more with me, American. If I fall you go free; if you fall, you shall give yourself pleasantly to death —graciously reduced by my clemency to but ten swift slicings of my best executioner's ling ch'i. Then will I celebrate my victory over a rival wrestler, by destroying at one blow, legations, ministers, foreigners—all who defy my power and refuse my mercy. Come! prepare!"

Ned was about to reply, but the envoy stopped him with a gesture.

"Your pardon, highness!" he said. "Let us

be just, even to our foreign foes. This youth is well nigh spent with his trial of muscles that, by accident, surely, gave the victory to him. Let him rest for new strength before the test, and meanwhile, let him show you how these Americans can ride. I have heard that they are mighty horsemen."

"Good!" Prince Tuan nodded his approval. "The Prince Ching has a wise and clever servant, whose advice is excellent. Can you ride, American?"

"My father, O prince, is owner of thousands of broad acres and many swift horses," the lad replied. "I was brought up on horseback. Try me."

Again the prince nodded his approval. "Good!" he exclaimed again. "I try you, American, on my best—not the mountain horses you have seen in the field, but the black Tartar horse the Russian envoy gave me. If you master him and three times circle the field and outride my best horseman I will grant you to be twice the victor—in the wrestle and the ride—and you shall choose your own manner of death; for die you must; I have sworn it."

Slowly the interpreter rendered the Manchu's decision.

"Kotow your thanks," the Omaha merchant whispered. "Then ride! for life or death. The way is straight and open through the palace. Be wary and swift."

Ned prepared for the ride carefully.

"It is for life or death," he counselled himself; "probably for death; it looks so, but I'll not shame my training or die unless I have to."

The Tartar was a noble animal, black and without blemish, towering above the little mountain horses upon whom he looked down in contempt, and so restive and strong as to call for three grooms to hold and lead him. His neck arched and tossed superbly and he pranced and pawed and pulled as if mad to be free. A light bridle was his only trapping and even that chaffed and annoyed him.

Ned regarded him critically.

"A fair animal," he said to the interpreter; "but my father has even more vicious brutes than this. Am I to select my own saddle?"

In reply to the question, the prince nodded.

The American took up his khaki blouse, folded it neatly without crease or rumple and while a half dozen grooms danced about to hold the restless Tartar, the lad deftly and firmly strapped his jacket to the horse's back, feeling secretly, to make sure the letter to Prince Ching was safe. Then he begged for his own use the loan of the blouse and cap of the prince's uniformed guard, and with a salute to the prince vaulted to the back of the restless Tartar, raging under the American's homemade saddle.

The fight for conquest between horse and rider held for full five minutes. But this son of the West-

ern ranch and the campaign field had tamed many a bucking broncho; he had backed vicious horses before, and the victory was his. With a shout and a wave of his hand in challenge he darted off on the stretch around the field, the prince's picked riders galloping at his heels.

Once around; twice around; he led them all by a full quarter stretch while the Prince Tuan, his grim face resting on his hand, watched with all the delight and interest of one who dearly loved a race.

The young rider turned for the third round; the horse was going at a great pace when, suddenly, with a swift turn of the bridle, straight about Ned wheeled the black Tartar and, with the yell of the Yankee battle charge that brought prince and people to their feet, he headed straight for the palace entrance, and, with another yell, scattering servants, soldiers, beggars and retainers to the left and right, straight through the palace he dashed, out at the Yamen gate, and like a black terror before which guards and coolies fell away in fright, the boy on horseback burst into the street of the Tartar city.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SCHEMING OF CAPTAIN ULLMAN

"CHING; Ching! The Prince Ching!" Ned shouted as he rode, waving in his free hand the letter he had drawn from his belt.

The name and the flaunted paper people could understand, and as they recognized the great black horse of Prince Tuan, the Manchu and the blue coat and cap of his uniformed guard they knew that the messenger rode on some mighty business and they gave him way without stop or hindrance.

But Ned Pevear had no more idea where the palace of Prince Ching stood or how to reach it than had the black Arabian he rode at such a breakneck pace. His one idea was to escape the vengeance of Prince Tuan; so he galloped blindly ahead hoping to gain at last the safety of the legation lines or by some ill-guarded gate, make his way out of the Tartar city.

But the Tartar city of Pekin, like all Chinese cities, is a Chinese puzzle and Ned's acquaintance with it had thus far been confined to the outside. But far ahead, a mile away at least, overtopping the

squat houses of the Tartar city, rose the great walls of the Imperial or Forbidden City—the residence of Emperor and court, a fortress within a fortress.

"Not that way, anyhow," Ned declared to himself; "that'll be rushing into the dragon's open jaws," and swerving from the wide, dusty, offensive and filth-encumbered avenue along which he was galloping, the American sought a cut-off through one of the narrow lanes that served as cross streets and which, he hoped, might bring him into another avenue that should lead away from the Imperial City.

Ned felt but little fear of attack. His black horse and his uniform of Prince Tuan's guard were, he believed, sufficient protection from Boxer, Imperial soldier, Bannerman or Pekin rioter. His duty, he knew, was to find the Prince Ching and deliver the message he bore. But how? but how?

Musing thus as he guided his restive horse through the encumbering filth of the narrow street scarce wide enough for horse and rider, Ned was suddenly brought to the right-about as another horseman, in the uniform of the Imperial cavalry, dashed into the wide avenue and galloped straight against the boy on the black Arabian.

The cavalryman's hand grabbed at Ned's bridle rein and before the American could resist he had thrown the black horse fairly on its haunches, while a loud demand in voluble Chinese was flung at the

young fellow to the evident delight of the growing crowd of Chinamen that began to throng about the two horsemen.

Surprised and startled though he was, Ned still retained a grip on his self-possession and shaking in the face of his antagonist, the paper he was carrying, he cried "Ching! Prince Ching! I ride to the Prince Ching," using the name as his best and only pass-word.

Again a volley of Chinese protests and expletives broke from the cavalryman, but, in the midst of them, Ned was astonished to hear in excellent English words: "Resist not, my friend, but come with me; it is our only chance for escape."

Ned suffered himself to be turned away, but as he rode at a quick pace alongside this Imperial cavalryman who spoke English he stole a rapid but searching glance at the face of his escort.

"By George!" he cried—but cautiously, "It's the German drillmaster. Cap'n Ullman, where did you drop from?"

"From off the legation wall," the German replied with lowered voice and an expansive smile. "I am a messenger to find a messenger—and behold. I have found him."

"But—in that uniform?" queried Ned.

"I was a coolie when I was lowered from the legation wall; but—well—I know Pekin, my dear

friend, and much may be procured by the right manner,—even this uniform of the Imperial cavalry. And why did I drop from the wall? For you, my friend. I know the ways of these men of China—the official men; and I knew that your only help lay in the Prince Ching, to whom, behold! I go to beg your life—with you whom I would save riding by my side. It is peculiar, yes?"

"Right you are," replied Ned. "For, look, Cap'n Ullman. I, too, am trying to find the palace of Prince Ching to deliver him my letters, as is my duty."

And the American lad thrust before the eyes of the German, the message from the Ministers at the Legation. "To the Prince Ching and others."

"And you held to it through all, eh?" cried the German with enthusiasm. "It is like you, my brave one. You kept it from the hand of Prince Tuan, yes? But how?"

Ned related briefly the story of his adventures at the palace of the great Manchu prince, to which Ullman listened with much nodding of the head and many emphatic expressions of interest.

"And, my friend," queried the German, as Ned concluded his narrative, "the message—the letter to the Prince Ching? You had it upon you, perhaps, when you wrestled with the Prince Tuan?—a great feat, that wrestle; but, see what training may do.

But, you, perhaps, kept it or laid it aside—the letter?"

"Why, of course, I laid it aside, Cap'n, when I stripped for the wrestle," Ned replied. "There wouldn't have been anything left of it if I'd kept it on me."

"And now? Is there anything left of it, as you say?" queried the German.

"Why, certainly, here it is. Don't you see it? Addressed—sealed—and un——" Ned began. Then a great fear broke on him. "You don't mean, surely—"

As the lad stopped the German captain nodded his head oracularly.

"That is just what I do mean, Herr Ned," he replied. "Said I not to you that I know the ways of these men of China—the official men? They are full of what you would call the craftiness. Give to me your message. I will show you."

And taking from Ned Pevear's unresisting hand the message he had held so guardedly, the German without asking permission tore open the envelope.

Ned uttered a cry of protest.

"See! What said I?" Ullman exclaimed. "Look you. See for yourself."

Ned Pevear's cry of protest changed to one of dismay, astonishment and rage. The letter which the German Captain extracted from the envelope of

the legation and displayed to the American was a blank sheet of paper!

"The rascals! The villains, the—the—heathen Chinees!" cried Ned at loss for words to express his feelings. "Of all the low-down, dirty tricks to play on a white man this—this—beats 'em all."

Words evidently were lacking; but his thoughts were vigorous.

"It is plain to one who knows your friend yonder," the German said with a backward nod toward Prince Tuan's palace. "He invites you to a wrestle; he shows you all courtesy; and when you have laid aside your blouse, his secretary extracts your despatch, reads it, keeps it, puts in its place a blank—a blank, say I? Slowly, let us go slowly, my friend; is it a blank? I know these—Ach! so; I thought it. Look you, Herr Ned, what the Prince Tuan had placed again in your violated envelope. So, I hold it to the light. See you anything?"

Ned looked carefully at the blank paper held aloft to the light.

"Why, it is no blank," he said. "There's something on it. Tea-chest markings; fire-cracker letters. It's Chinese."

"Ah, it is the head you have, my Ned, the great head," the German said with nods that savored of sarcasm. "And the Chinese—in English—what think you it means?"

"Give it up," said Ned. "I'm not up in it yet."

"Listen you," said Captain Ullman, "thus reads the message you bear to the Prince Ching: 'We send to your highness, a foreign spy from the legations, caught within our palace. We would have given him to ling-ch'i—(the slicing with the axe, my friend) did we not feel that your Highness should share with us the responsibility. We pray you put him to the torture at once. His confessions may be of value.' Now, boy, will you ride to the torture? Will you deliver your message to the Prince Ching?"

"But it is not my message," Ned replied. "It is —by George,"—and he wheeled his horse about— "I'll ride back to that fraud of a Tuan, and face him with his treachery. I'll—"

"You'll ride back to the death that is certain, whichever way you turn," the German replied. "Prince Ching cannot protect you; Prince Tuan is even now on your track; to enter the legation grounds is now impossible. Your only way is to gallop back to Tien Tsin and the camp of the allies. Look you. I will ride with you. We are couriers from Prince Tuan to the general in the command before Tien Tsin."

"Who is he?" queried Ned.

"Ach himmel, who knows that? Not I." the German exclaimed. "Is it Sung Ching, or Yung Lee or, perhaps, that dragon fiend Tung-fuh-Chan?

What then? Would I say go to the general in command? No, my friend, we go away from them. Our salvation is to get inside the allied lines. But, until we do, we are the Chinese cavalry riders—couriers from Pekin. Trust to me. I know the Chinese. Is it not for me to pull over the eyes the wool, as you say—yes?"

"It's Hobson's choice, Cap'n, I reckon," Ned replied with his usual readiness to accept things as they were. "Only—don't try any of that military business you tried with the Boxer signs—you remember. That got us into a nice pickle, you know."

"From which you got out, eh?" the German replied. "But we are not Boxers; we are of the Imperial cavalry and ride on duty. Who shall stop us?"

Ned hoped no one would; but he knew that there were many slips between cup and lip—in China, and he devoutly hoped the captain would pull them through all right. Certainly, his own mission had not been a success. He had escaped, thus far, but his message had gone wrong and he had no hope in the Prince Ching. If only, the lad thought,—if only he could think up some daring scheme that should startle the world and make China come down quicker than "Cap'n Scott's coon." Suppose—suppose—By George! Why not? Suppose he and Ullman in their Chinese uniforms should steal their way into

the Forbidden City and kidnap the young emperor—or the Dowager Empress? Whew! What a scheme? But why not?

At once, fired by the plan he communicated it to his companion.

The captain patted the young American on the bridle arm as if in appreciation and encouragement.

"It is a grand—a marvel of a plan," he said with nod and smile. "The young emperor, he would be of joy to see thee. He delights in things American. His toys are of your country—machinery—the electrical—all things, from fire engine to railway engine, to telephone and phonograph. He has too much of the toys that are noisy and talkative; he would welcome, perhaps, the toy that is silent—the head of an American boy."

"My head?" cried Ned. "Why, what do you mean, Cap'n?"

"What I have said, my friend," the German replied with a meaning smile. "The head of the Herr Ned would be the only thing that would come into the presence of the young Kwang. See the emperor? Why, what think you? That it is possible we could pass soldiers, armed guards, spies, people of the gates and of the palace, and find our way to the emperor—whom no one sees? Set thy head straight on thy shoulders, good friend. Himmel! it is turned already."

Ned would still have reasoned out his grand scheme; but again the hand of his companion was laid upon his arm and the whispered warning fell upon his ear: "Ei, ride carefully, my friend, and say nothing. We are at the Hatu-men gate."

Ned nodded, and keeping his black horse well abreast of his companion rode on, watchful but with well-assumed confidence, as if he feared no questioning from the guard at the gate, when one rode as the courier of Prince Tuan.

Suddenly, the German gave a twist on Ned's bridle rein and turned swiftly to the left. Down a narrow side street they rode in single file, with no word of explanation from the captain and no word of inquiry from the American. Then, where it "debouched" into a wider avenue, the captain dropped beside Ned.

"It was but just by the skin of our teeth, as you would say, Herr Ned," he whispered. "They were Prince Tuan's soldiers, who waited on watch with the guard at the Hatu-men gate."

"Whew! you did turn just in time," said Ned. "Where now, Cap'n?"

"Um, um, let me think," the captain mumbled, patting his nose. "If by the other gates, they, too, are guarded, and we go to our death; if by—ach, so, it is the thing, the very thing," and to Ned's surprise, the German captain flung his bridle to the

American and dropping from his horse strode into the broad avenue and accosted a man in charge of a kneeling camel train.

Ned had been long enough in China to recognize in the ruddy yellow and pleasant frankness of the camel driver's face, the Tartar, and not the native Chinaman. The man stood beside the unwilling dromedary he had just ordered to its feet, and in his hand he held the single rein which, attached to the piece of wood that passed through the dromedary's nostrils, was the bridle that guided that beast of burden. In his other hand he held the big, loaded staff with its thick thong of knotted leather, that served as the camel's instrument of discipline.

The Tartar's eyes looked over the street to where Ned stood with the horses. Then he ordered the camel to its knees and crossed the street with the German captain.

To the Tartar the German and American were but Chinese cavalrymen who were ready to desert the service. To the American the Tartar was a different being from the Chinaman; there was a certain picturesqueness about his heavily wadded clothes, his dyed sheepskins and his gold-buttoned Chinese cap, perched on top of his fur hood, all in bright contrasting colors, that attracted the lad and led him somehow to trust in the Tartar as a means of escape.

Just how he could be made a means of escape Ned could not see, nor could he understand the peculiar methods by which the captain hoped to convince this wandering merchant of the Mongolian plains. The talk was all in Chinese, but from the critical looks with which the Tartar inspected the two horses, Ned inferred that some kind of a " dicker " was afoot.

There was; for before five minutes had passed, and while the captain's eyes were beginning to move restlessly toward the streets that led to the Hatumen gate, the Tartar nodded his confirmation of the German's offer, and opening the door of a warehouse almost at Ned's back motioned the two foreigners within and begun stripping off the accoutrements of their horses.

" It is a risk, my friend Ned," the captain said in low tones, " but it is for us to try it. For these, our horses, the Tartar, who is camel-owner and horse-trader, will try to get us through the gates. I who speak Chinese will go in Tartar dress with him, on the foot, beside the camels; but you who speak it not and are best out of sight will he stuff into one of the big baskets in which sometimes ride his children, swung over the camel's back."

Even in the dusk of the warehouse the captain could seem to see Ned Pevear's expression of dissent and dismay, for he laughed a German chuckle of fun at the lad's expense.

"What! I go out in a child's basket?" said Ned. "Why, I can't. I'm too big for it, I know."

"You must make yourself small, *mein lieber kind,*" laughed the German, "or the Chinese artist of the Prince Tuan will make you shorter forever by a head. It will not be what you call riding in the luxurious, but it will be riding to life, and is not that worth the crowding yourself, eh?"

It certainly was, and Ned decided to swallow his pride and be a child again; so by the time that the Tartar and his yellow-jacketed wife came waddling to the warehouse door with a big basket between them, Ned was quite ready to throw into it his own suit of khaki and climbing into the basket in his Chinese uniform make himself as small as possible and thus be speedily hoisted to the back of the double-humped, short-legged, shaggy and powerful beast of burden known as the dromedary.

He had just a sight of Captain Ullman, in Tartar raiment with sheepskin boots and knotted leather thong and staff shambling off as the Tartar's assistant, and to hear his comrade's parting word of warning: "Lie you still, Herr Ned and play the baby or you will never live to grow up;" then the procession was off—camels, horses, Tartars and all, bound for the Hatu-men gate.

The tide of travel, always heavy through this main entrance to the Tartar city, was especially so

that day, as troops were hurried to the front to stay the advance of the "foreign devils," and refugees from the villages toward Tien Tsin, straggled into the capital to find shelter or safety with their friends in the quadruple city. So, the caravan was but briefly stopped for questioning at the gate and then passed shambling through, while Ned in his "baby basket" blamed his fate and feared it, too, as he made himself as diminutive as possible.

The little cur that was tied above the covered basket top "yapped" viciously at some enraging pass or threat of a bystander, who replied with an equally vicious thrust of spear at the cur and the basket, to the imminent danger of the lad within the "pannier." In fact, Ned's head did almost pop out of his hiding place, as he felt rather than saw the spear-point coming through his basket defences; but a heavy hand came down upon his head and a sharp female voice mingled defiance at the guardsman, threats at the yelping cur and soothing song to the "baby" within the basket. It may be said, in all confidence, that Ned Pevear never felt so small in all his life.

So out of the Tartar and through the Chinese city the shambling camel train passed on until the outer wall was reached, two miles beyond the Hatu-men gate.

Before the deep arch that pierced the solid outer

wall of Pekin the procession halted again for question and right of exit. Ned was all "aches and cricks" as he declared to himself, but his ears were intently listening, for he knew enough of his surroundings to feel assured that the last barrier was about to be passed.

The questions and answers were brief and unexciting, the *tchk* of the camel-driver started the train along again when, suddenly, came an excited demand and assertion, to which the mingling voices of the Tartar camel-driver and his assistant answered in angry denial. Ned could make out the tones of his German confederate, though raised in shrill Chinese, and wondered what under the sun was happening now.

Cautiously he lifted his eyes above the basket rim and as cautiously peered out. The crossed spears and hook-like staves of the soldiers and city police barred the progress of the camels, while, almost beside him, a soldier in the livery of Prince Tuan had laid a restraining hand upon the black charger of his master.

Ned's heart leaped to his throat as he flattened himself into the basket.

Angry words increased. The passing throngs, blocked in their exit and entrance, became impatient of the delay; there was pushing and shoving this way and that; the dromedary from whose back

Ned's basket hung swayed this way and that like a ship at sea, and with grunt and stamp and kick displayed his hostility at the interruption of his sulky meditation; then Ned felt the forward rush as if the out-going throng at the gate fairly pushed its way through; there was a clashing of spears, a shot and then another from pistol or rifle; the dromedary stumbled and fell head-foremost to the ground, and the "baby basket," thrown forward, dumped its living contents, stiffened but sprawling, in the roadway, while the Tartar woman who rode man-fashion across the camel's back and who had posed as "the baby's" mother, came with a thump and a thud full upon the prostrate American lad, and there was a sad muddle and catastrophe before the Sha-wo gate of old Pekin.

CHAPTER XV

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE JUNK

THE hubbub was great. Down from enciente and tower, out from camp and guard house soldiers came running furiously; camels screamed, dogs barked, horses neighed, and every dialect of China mingled in a mighty din. But Ned lay quiet. Discretion, that young man had learned, was the better part of valor, and any other kind of valor, just then, he felt would be misplaced. Stiffened by his cramped and huddled ride; bruised from his sudden and unexpected overthrow, half smothered by the weight of his Tartar "mother" who still rested, far from lightly, upon him, the American could not have moved just then even had he so desired.

But the respite was short. The Tartar scrambled to her feet; the demand of the camel driver for restitution and revenge for his wounded dromedary rose in fierce bicker above the downfallen beast, and Ned was expecting every moment to be hauled to his feet a prisoner, when he felt a covering thrown over him; then in the midst of a new quarrel and scuffle

he felt himself picked up bodily and actually run away with,—where, he could not tell.

There came another stumble and fall, and as he again "touched earth" in a daze of wonder and bruises, he heard the German's voice in his ear.

"Uncover yourself carefully; do not rise until I bid you. Run, when I say so, keep close to me and run even as I do—for life."

Cautiously Ned Pevear pushed off the sheepskin cover that had enveloped him; then, finding himself backed by something soft and yielding, with a very "beasty" smell and a most unfriendly grunt, he braced himself well and looked about him.

He had been thrown down by the captain in the very centre of one of the many camel tea-caravans that rested, as for centuries they have rested, in the plain just outside the great, gloomy, towering walls of Pekin. Camels kneeling and standing, bales, boxes, rolls and poles were all around him, while, under the lee of a great tea bale almost at his elbow, squatted the German captain, stripping himself of his Tartar encumbrances.

"They are even yet at it over there, my friend," he said with a nod toward the gate where the jabbering crowd still swayed and argued and shouted. "They have not missed us yet. Shall we run for it? Are you ready, yes?"

"Whenever you are, Cap'n. One—two—three—

go! Now we're off," answered Ned, springing to his feet.

They were off, like the wind, elbow to elbow, making rapid time—Ned did not know why or whither. To one confined, cramped, crowded, smothered and tumbled, as he had been, it is natural that it should be hard to properly get one's bearings.

"Where to?" he queried, as he ran.

"For the river," his comrade replied. "If but we make that, it is for us perhaps to smuggle down to Tien Tsin."

"How far?" Ned demanded.

"Don't talk; keep your breath. The river? twelve miles," the German replied shortly.

"Twelve miles? Great Peter! and run like this all the way?" cried Ned. "Take me back to my baby basket."

It was a serious proposition even to a seasoned sprinter like Ned Pevear. It is a good twelve miles from Pekin to Tung Chow on the North, or Pei Ho, River. The old paved highway of the ancient kings, broad but horribly broken, is the most direct, but the hardest to travel; one or the other of the three parallel roadways, little more than deep rutted cartways through mud or dust, any of them, are the ones generally used by those who have some respect for breath and bones. Neither paved highway nor rutted roadway is acceptable where all are so bad;

and, through a country seething with war-excitement, crowded with troops and full of dangers, the run to Tung Chow by two unarmed and hated "foreign devils" through men thirsting for their blood was, to say the least, not a pleasure trip.

But Ned and Captain Ullman were old campaigners who had been through many perils and come out unscathed; German persistency and Yankee pluck laughed at all obstacles, or saw in them only something to be overcome. So, in spite of Ned's objection to a twelve-mile run, he had no intention of giving in, and, sparing voice and breath, as the captain advised, he kept up the gait and trotted elbow to elbow beside his comrade.

It seemed odd that they should have traveled on thus unmolested, but, as has often been shown, the safest place for a fugitive is in a crowd; and among moving masses of men—soldiers, Boxers and non-combatants—going and coming between Pekin and Tung Chow, intent on their own affairs, the running figures of two uniformed Chinese soldiers, evidently couriers from the capital, passed unmolested.

Down from the beleaguered legation wall came the boom-boom of cannon that told the fugitives that the attack and defence were still on; the noise gave wings to their feet, for dread as to the consequences to the imprisoned and besieged foreigners was quite as strong upon them as the fear for their own safety.

In fact, this dread as to the safety of the legationers so far exceeded their own personal fears that the fugitives grew less cautious as they proceeded, and when the waters of the great canal were in sight, and they knew that beyond the walls of Tung Chow, the muddy Pei-ho ran downward to Tien Tsin, their eagerness so exceeded their caution that they walked straight into the arms of a detachment of Imperial infantrymen, encamped beside the roadway, awaiting orders.

Ned's "Great Scott!" was noisily silenced by the German's instant and voluble queries, and the responses of the officer in charge of the detachment—all, of course, in Chinese.

Evidently the German had decided to try a grand "bluff." His shrewd glance had taken in the situation, and, indeed, as he afterwards explained to Ned Pevear, he assumed that he and his companion were special couriers from Prince Tuan, charged with a message to the commander of the detachment.

"I told him," said Captain Ullman, "that the Prince's orders were too hurried to be put in writing, but that he bade the commander at once to make for the canal and the river, seize the largest and swiftest river junks he could find and push down as rapidly as possible until he should come up with the general Tung-fuh-Chan, who is undoubtedly hurling back the foreign devils to Tien Tsin or the sea. I, the

courier, am to tell the general that the Prince is to send great hosts of reinforcements to complete the slaughter of the meddling and miserable foreigners."

"Great bluff, that," said Ned, as the Captain explained his scheme; "and it worked—for a while."

It did work for a while, certainly. The infantrymen were on their feet in an instant, and, with the supposed couriers in their company, pushed on to the river. Ned wisely refrained from attempted conversation and the Captain's Chinese served all purposes until the river was reached. A dozen of the largest river junks were speedily confiscated and down the river under the vigorous work of impressed coolie boatmen, the junks went sweeping toward Tien Tsin.

But, even while Ned was congratulating himself over the success of the German captain's somewhat questionable plan, the expected happened—trouble.

Across country, through rice and corn fields, galloped another brace of couriers, and dashing down the river bank came abreast of the junks, and, with shrill summons, waving hands and the excess of Asiatic emphasis, sought to stay the progress of the flotilla.

"The trouble for us is yonder, Herr Ned," the German whispered to the American lad. "Think of it—there were two couriers after all and we were behind. Now, come the true ones. How will it

be with us? Did ever one see such—how you call it—*ungluck?*"

He rose to his feet; he waved a refusal to the shouting messengers; he expostulated with the commander of the detachment who, in the next junk, was disposed to lay by for the message. He reminded him of Prince Tuan's imperative orders and told him that the Prince had commanded haste, and to stop for nothing. The commander finally yielded to the German's exhortations and, shouting to the messengers that he was under hurry orders and could not stop even for them, he bade the expedition hasten onward.

The German captain dropped beside Ned with a sigh of relief.

"Again the shave was close," he said. "Ach, himmel! if but we can be saved from such disturbers all may go well."

But the disturbers would not acknowledge defeat. Fairly dancing with rage they seemed ready to leap into the water and swim for the junks when, just then, one of the small, swift, thatched post-boats, rowed by foot and steered by hand came slowly up propelled by its single coolie boatman. The couriers spied it, they turned their horses loose, and ordering the coolie inshore fairly waded aboard and turning the boat about belabored the coolie boatman, until with all his force of foot and hand, he drove

the post-boat abreast of the junk in which rode the commander of the troops.

Stopping neither for protest or hindrance they sprang aboard the junk and at once launched into a torrent of Chinese speech.

Ned and the captain gave one swift glance at this new turn of affairs; then the German settled himself again with apparent coolness and unconcern.

"'What are you going to do now?" queried Ned.

"I do nothing, my friend. Others shall do; I wait," was all his companion would reply.

The wait was not long. There came a hail from the commander's junk, and obeying orders the boatmen ceased poling while the commander's junk came alongside.

The commander of the troops with the two couriers beside him confronted the two masquerading cavalrymen, as Ned and the Captain rose to meet them.

A sharp and harsh demand came from the commander, and the Captain's brief answer was met by shrill protest and denial from the later arrived couriers.

"O, the pity of it, my friend, the pity of it that to you the Chinese tongue is not known," Captain Ullman said to Ned as, later, he gave him the details of the interview. "Of me the commander de-

manded who we were, and when I would say again we were couriers with orders from Prince Tuan, the latest arrived shrieked that I lied and that they were the Prince's messengers, with orders for the soldiers we had stolen away to return at once to the capital, for the attack on the legations. But, behold! when I demanded that the messengers should show the honorable commander their orders from the Prince, then, what think you? like us they had none, for they rode even as did we in great haste and with only word of mouth orders, like to us. That was when I laughed, and, turning my back upon them, said to the commander that our orders were first and imperative. I told him to remember Prince Tuan's wrath when one disobeyed his orders, and shrugging my shoulders I said, 'Will the honorable commander be responsible for the anger of Prince Tuan? I will not. My duty I have done. Let the highly respected and honorable commander do his duty and visit justice on these spies who come to him with false orders. I know them;' I cried, suddenly turning upon the couriers swiftly. 'I say to the honorable commander they are spies—messengers from the foreigners held by our brave army within the legations, and sent down the river to beg help for their imprisoned masters, from the foreign soldiers at Tien Tsin.' Then —ha! mark you the inspiration, Herr Ned, I snatched me off the cap of one of the couriers, and

slyly running my hand within the lining drew out a piece of paper on which was writing. 'Look you here! noble commander,' I cried, 'behold the message to the foreign devils they are even now, as I said, conveying concealed about them.'"

"Good gracious! Captain. What was it? How did it get there?" demanded Ned excitedly.

The German gave a significant shrug.

"It was simple, my friend," he said. "I am not stupid with—with—*der laschenspielerstreich*—the what you call the sleight hand—the legerdemain. I had the paper, the note in my hand, when I thrust it within the courier's cap. And there you are! And they—" here the captain gave a chuckle—"saw you not how they were dragged away and flung below board and gagged? Truly it is our star of luck that shines to-day, Herr Ned?"

It did seem so, certainly. To be sure, the commander of the detachment had not permitted the two alleged couriers to return to their junk but had held them with him, "for the safe-keeping," the captain declared, but with the silencing of the new comers the greatest danger seemed past.

They were not, however,—the more's the pity!—thoroughly silenced. Little by little, one of the captives first loosened the gag and then slowly but patiently worked it free. Suddenly upon the ears of the whole junk came the startling shriek of demand:

"Hear me, hear me, most noble! The truth, hear the truth. They are foreign devils themselves."

"Ach, *horchen!* heard you that?" the German cried, starting up. "He finds us out; his gag is free. Hold you hard, *mein lieber,* hold you fast. The shock is to come."

The shrieks of the ungagged one would not be silenced until once again he had been brought before the commander.

"We have none such in our guard of the Prince Tuan," the released one cried. "They are in disguise; they are spies. Stop them, stop them and see the white skin."

The commander hesitated an instant. Then so insistent appeared the accuser that he wavered and gave the order to his second in command.

"Strip them," he said.

A half dozen soldiers advanced upon Ned and the captain. The American, with a sovereign faith in his swimming powers, gave one glance at the river and prepared for a "header." But the German laid a hand upon his arm and defiantly waved back the advancing soldiers.

"Who touches me does so at his peril," he said. "Commander, hear me! The spy speaks true. Look you, I have the white skin; so has my companion. There is no need to strip me, and it would be death should you do so. For, behold. I am of

the army; I am of the Emperor's own. And this is my lieutenant. I am the foreign captain, Carl Ullman, Imperial drill master in the Chinese service. Behold, I have the button of a mandarin."

And flinging open his Chinese uniform, he displayed to the astonished soldier, strung on a ribbon about his neck, the red button of a mandarin.

Involuntarily, the commander of the detachment saluted the special officer of the emperor, even though his second thought was again a suspicion and an inquiry.

"But why in that costume?" he demanded. "Why does the Imperial drill master travel in the costume of Prince Tuan's soldier?"

"On special service, most excellent commander," the German replied. "I who can speak three languages of the foreign devils and that of the Purple Kingdom, too, am sent upon work, of which even to you, excellent one, I may not speak, when it is mine to command and not to obey.

Ned, of course, could not understand this talk. His knowledge of Chinese was meagre and his impatience over this "confab" that he could not fathom was hot within him. But he was shrewd enough to keep silent. He knew that the captain was, as he assured himself, "working another bluff on the Chinkies, and it behooves you to stand mum and keep a stiff upper lip, Ned Pevear, my boy."

The captain was, indeed, playing his last card. He knew full well that not a foreign drill master was left in the Chinese service; that they had either been discharged before hostilities commenced, or, if, like him, they had for a time been impressed into the Chinese service they had, like him also, escaped as soon as possible; for the ban against the foreigners would threaten their safety, their very existence.

But to know a thing yourself is not a proof that others know it, too; and the captain took that risk. In this it seemed as if he were, apparently, safe; for after a brief period of thought the Chinese officer again saluted the German.

"It may be as you say," he announced finally. "You have the manner; you have the Imperial button. It is not for me to decide against the Prince Tuan and his majesty, the Emperor. But, there are chances. Remain with me, noble foreign captain. Below us at Yang-tsun is his exalted excellency, the viceroy Yu-lu. To him will we refer the matter, and until then you two who claim to be the couriers of the prince and those other two who claim the same, shall here remain under guard, until the viceroy decides."

The captain saluted and placed a reassuring hand upon the shoulder of his companion.

"So far it is well, my friend," he said in English. "The shock to us is, as you say, postponed. We

are given the respite until we reach Yang-tsun, below."

But the accusing courier was not satisfied. Pointing at Ned Pevear he broke out into new accusations.

"But this other foreign devil," he said laying upon Ned's breast a threatening hand which the lad angrily threw off. "He is no drillmaster. He is—" and before Ned or the Captain could interfere, with another rough grasp he had torn open Ned's disguise of Chinese uniform and snatching off his cap had uncovered his tell-tale hair. "See, I knew it!" he said. "This is a fugitive from Prince Tuan's palace. He is a messenger from the legations who wrestled with the great prince himself on the racecourse and fled away with Prince Tuan's great black horse. I saw him there. I saw him escape. It is death to him—death and the torture, if the Prince capture him again."

Ned could only understand that it was his turn now, but again he relied upon his German friend as his main chance.

The Captain made swift reply.

"The soldier is but a son of lies—or else a fool," he said to the Chinese officer. "This younger brother is my assistant; he was the guest of the Prince Tuan. Does the great prince wrestle with his enemies or lend to them his great black charger on

the race course? Foolish one, did not the Prince Tuan do both with this one?"

And he kept his hand still upon the lad's shoulder.

"He did, but—"

"Hearken to the spy," cried the German drill-master. "He says yes to my demand. Beware, Excellent Commander. Touch not the friend and guest of Prince Tuan, our great general. For this insult to my assistant, the prince will have vengeance on this spy of the foreigners and even upon you."

Again the accusing and baffled guardsman was forced to take a back seat, as the puzzled Chinese officer waved both the disputants aside and declared his intention of letting the matter rest until he could lay it for decision before the viceroy Yu-lu at Yang-tsun.

Once more the German captain dropped beside his friend on the deck of the river junk and detailing the accusation and relief, added, "And thus, dear lad, are we once again respited until we reach Yang-tsun. And there—"

"Well, and there?"

"It shall be as we shall see," the German replied. "This viceroy, Yu-lu, is a shrewd yet timid one. Who knoweth, perhaps we may still work through in safety. It is worth the trying, yes?"

"While there's life, there's hope," returned Ned.

"Bring on your viceroy. I'll risk you, Cap'n, I reckon, against twenty viceroys."

Down the tortuous Pei-ho, twisting and turning, the river junks impelled by the strong arms of the coolie boatmen and the great square sails that swung above them, one to each junk, floated swiftly on. Soon the banks of the river seemed to be alive with people; bodies of troops were hastening one way; streams of fugitives were hurrying the other and far ahead the quick ear of the young American scout and messenger could catch, first faintly and then more distinctly a noise he knew full well.

"Hark! did you hear that, Cap'n?" he cried in a hoarse whisper. "It's the boom of big guns. It's our boys, I know. Hey! hurrah for our side; the allies are on the march."

The commander of the Chinese detachment heard it, too.

"A battle," he said.

"As I told you, Exalted Commander," the captain replied. "Now, whom do you believe. You have Prince Tuan's orders. Press on and join your brothers, who, yonder are driving the foreigners back to the sea."

Nearer and nearer came the noise of battle. The boom and yap of the cannons and the rapid fire guns told that the fight was on, and just beyond the junks

were now descried above the corn-fields the low roofs of Yang-tsun.

At once the boats were driven ashore and the soldiers disembarked. Still guarded by a special squad the semi-prisoners were hurried from the river bank to the town and even while Ned, feverish in his desire to join the allied fighters, was contemplating some rapid dash for liberty the guard and the commander halted before an open house of the better sort.

A portly Chinese official stood in the doorway; before him the commander of the soldiers from the junks bowed low.

The German captain gave a low, inaudible whistle and clutched Ned Pevear's arm.

"It is the viceroy Yu-lu," he said.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COURIER OF PRINCE TUAN.

THERE was a rapid interchange of query and reply. Upon the face of the viceroy a troubled expression, and what Ned called a far-away look, were apparent. He seemed to have one ear to the distant firing and one to the commander's report. Finally, he turned his eyes upon the four disputants.

"Couriers from the Prince Tuan, you say, with differing orders?" he remarked, "and these," indicating Ned and the captain—"are foreign devils? Kill them both—or stay," he added, as the German strode boldly before him and was about to launch forth a protest and defiance; "where two dangers threaten avoid both. Could I know which way matters were going where the great guns are booming I might decide this. But if the foreigners come this way it is wiser to show mercy to their brothers here. Bring them into the yamen. Let those other couriers go free. In times of doubt favor both sides."

The commander of the detachment which Captain Ullman, the German, had so boldly and bodily stolen

from its post of duty did not look as if, after all, his Exalted Excellency the viceroy had shown himself to be so wise an official as he was reported; for the commander was puzzled as to just where his duty lay; with two rival couriers, giving utterly opposite orders and claiming each as the order of his chief, Prince Tuan, the Chinese official was in a quandary, and he told the viceroy as much.

Boom, boom! bang, bang! came the hoarse sounds of the strife from beyond Yang-tsun. The viceroy's look was that of the anxious and troubled man.

"Meanwhile, valiant fighter of the Prince," he said, "it is best not to lead your men anywhere. Keep them here to guard my legation until we see whether our brothers or the foreign devils win. Then will I give you new orders. It may be you will be needed to conduct these couriers of the prince, if such they be, to the presence of the General Tung-fuh-chan who leads our valiant ones, let us hope, to victory."

As, within the temporary yamen of the viceroy in the village of Yang-tsun, the two suspected "couriers" awaited under guard, the outcome of the duel of the guns, Ned declared to the captain his unwillingness to remain thus quiet while the battle was on.

"Our boys are putting in their best work down the river, I know, and we ought to be with them," he grumbled. "Come! Cap'n, you've brought us so

far, can't you stretch things a bit farther and get us inside our own lines?"

The captain had already explained to him the situation they were in and had rendered briefly in English the talk with and of the viceroy. He shrugged his shoulders over the young American's demand.

"As how?" he said, "we have, as you say, my friend, brought ourselves thus far in safety, but by what manœuvres and at what risks? Our luck favored us. Do you think it is to continue without break or what you call let-up, no?"

"Never can tell till you try," said Ned confidently.

"And perhaps tell the other thing, eh?" the captain said, shaking his head doubtfully, and yet, as Ned knew, thinking the problem out. "Here are, we know not how many thousands of Chinese troops between us and the allies. Would you then walk through their ranks as quietly and safely as if you were stepping off to the church on the Sabbath morning? *Nein, Nein,* that were—*ach—der dummdveist* —the part of foolishness. But wait, but wait—let—me—think. Ach! so. It is for me best to stay here. I am not yet, perhaps, what they call *persona grata* with the allied leaders, save as you could explain. This viceroy, Yu-lu, as you may see, is a coward. See now! if I can but get from him the permission, the order to pass you to the headquarters of the

Chinese general—the commander at the front, Tung-fuh-Chan, could you, think you, manage to lose the headquarters and stumble into the camp of the allies? Could you not, yes?"

Ned fairly hugged his German friend.

"Could I not, Cap'n?" he cried. "Just you get me that pass and try me. You know I always am stupid over the Chinese lingo. I'm really afraid I shall lose Mr. Tung-fuh-Chan's headquarters if I'm turned loose to find 'em. But I'd like to try."

The German captain laid a finger on his lips and a hand on the young American's arm and led him towards the entrance to the viceroy's private room.

"We would speak with his exalted Excellency," he said to the guard and pushed through into the apartment of the viceroy.

That noble official was listening at the open window, intent upon the distant firing. His servants were packing and cording bales and boxes of personal belongings, as if preparing for flight, while on the table, near to which the listening viceroy stood, Ned noticed a row of small bottles or vials filled with a dark liquid.

The viceroy turned swiftly about as the German and American pushed into the private room and hastily thrust forward a hand for one of the vials. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but the German captain gave him no opportunity.

"O noble and exalted one," he said, "the orders of Prince Tuan must be obeyed. And this for your security as well. Bid my brother courier here hasten to the general at the front with tidings of our reinforcements from Prince Tuan, who under your orders, O wise viceroy, remain here at Yang-tsun as reserve in case of need. Under your valiant orders, the general will know how well his rear is guarded and also that he has reserves to depend upon at need. I, who am drillmaster in the emperor's service will remain with you as hostage for my young brother and, perhaps, to be of service to you in case the need exists, and the foreigners break through our ranks and flank you here in your yamen. But of that there is little danger. Through our ranks of brave, fighting men, led by wise ones such as you, exalted one, no foreigners may ever hope to pass. But—what wisdom said your excellency—'in time of doubt favor both sides.' Favor us both, O wise one; let my brother speed with his word from Prince Tuan; keep me here as hostage, and as one who by speaking the speech of the foreigner may be of service to you, here in your honorable yamen."

The timid viceroy who assumed to be a hero looked shrewdly at the German drill-master.

"Your counsel is of good sound," he said at length. "Go forth, messenger from the Prince Tuan. Let this be your permit through our

ranks," and he signed what Ned called his laundry ticket.

"Bid the brave General Tung-fuh-Chan to stand firm against the foreign devils, but—but bid him let me know in all good season how the battle goes. It is not meet for one in my station to remain and fall into the hands of those miserable barbarians from over the seas."

Captain Ullman rapidly conveyed to Ned the orders of the viceroy.

"Farewell, dear lad," he said. "Speak well of me to the leaders of the allies. It is with them I have been ever, though against me seemed the circumstances. I will so frighten this coward viceroy that none of the Chinese soldiers here in Yang-tsun shall be sent to the front, and if the allies win through, speak you for me, and let me once more be under the flag of the Fatherland. *Hoch der Kaiser!*"

A few more words of farewell, one more pressure of the hand, a last word of caution and advice, and the German was left behind in the yamen of the viceroy, while Ned Pevear, still in the uniform of Prince Tuan's mounted guard was speeding through Yang-tsun, steering his course, by the spasmodic booming of the rival guns to liberty or death—he knew not which.

Ned knew something of Yang-tsun. He had been there, you remember, in his very first fight on Chinese

soil, when he and the British sergeant of marines went scouting in a hand car, and he remembered that the river and the road ran parallel for several miles.

But whether river or road was his safest highway he could not yet say. For three miles and more, to the right and left, the Chinese battle line extended, the thousands of reserves bunched back near to a little village just to the south of Yang-tsun, while from behind the railroad embankment as a breastwork the dozen or more big guns of the Chinese artillery kept up the boom and crash that guided Ned's forward march and fell so ominously on the ears of Yu-lu, the viceroy in Yang-tsun.

Back from Tien-tsin, back from Peit-sang, the Chinese thousands had fallen as the allies advanced, and here at the village that hid the approach to Yang-tsun they had massed for a final resistance.

Ned held his way at the jog trot of the official runner, straight through the restless thousands of the Chinese host, his pass in readiness for every question, his tongue silent even when his business was demanded. The Chinese general, so he learned from the pointing rather than the words that replied to his inquiring exhibition of the viceroy's pass, was near the battery behind the railway embankment so that direction was the one that the young American avoided. Keeping far to the left, through bayonet-

like fields of kowliang, or broom corn, the agile youth dodged and dashed, avoiding all moving bodies of troops as best he could and straining his eyes for something that fluttered that was not a Chinese flag or banner.

Of Chinese banners he had seen, as he declared, enough to make one dead tired. This way and that, over the bare plain and through the high broom corn, marching and countermarching as if to overawe the foreign devils with a display of strength, the gaudy banners of the Chinese host fluttered and flaunted in the bright sunlight, very theatrical looking, but, so it seemed to Ned, to no real effect.

He was very near to the battle line now. Could he dash across? he wondered. Edging to the left where the trampled and prostrate corn stalks gave an open vision across the lines he looked off through the corn. And then his heart thrilled with joy; for there, not two hundred yards away from the line of the Chinese trenches, he saw a moving column and a fluttering flag that he felt sure was the stars and stripes.

He would find out at all events. The day was broiling hot; the enemy were fiercely determined to make a stubborn stand; the boom of gun and the storm of shrapnel from the allied batteries kept the Chinese dodging and "kotowing," but Ned, heedless as ever, determined to brave the storm of shot

and shell and, unmindful of the blazing sun, make a dash for the allied lines.

Already there was, even to his anxious eyes, uneasiness and indecision in the movements of the Chinese troops; a confusion of orders, a weakening of backbone, a rushing this way and that of regular and irregular troops convinced Ned that a taste of the allied steel would break the last vestige of Chinese discipline. He must be the messenger to carry that assurance.

Determined to be cautious in spite of his anxiety, Ned edged still further to the left to clear, if he could, the range of the cross fire. Then, with one more glance through the bending corn to see that the coast was clear the American made a forward leap and sprang—straight into the rushing ranks of the trained Imperial troops of the Dragon-flag.

He had struck the extreme left of the Chinese line, as it swung around to stiffen the defenders of the trenches in the centre and repel any forward dash of the allies.

For just one instant Ned's heart was in his mouth. To be stopped on the very verge of liberty! it was maddening. Then, swiftly, his fear turned to rage, his rage to inspiration, as, fluttering the viceroy's pass as though he were the aid of the commander and bore his orders, he shouted out, "Tuan, Tuan! death to the Yang-kwei-tzse!"

Ned was very indistinct with his English words, but most emphatic with his Chinese. The fluttering paper, the name of the great prince, the defiance to the "foreign devils"—the Yang-kwei-tsze—came to the ears of the hurrying Imperial troops almost as a command and hundreds of them wheeling out of the ranks, clubbed their mannlichers as weapons of attack and followed at the heels of him whom they took to be an aid to the Prince Tuan.

But the Chinese, as you know, were, as Ned declared, never built for charging; and when from the centre of the allied line came a stir and motion that looked like retaliating measures, the hundreds of Imperials dropped to fifties and to tens and, finally, the "aid" who led the charging was dashing on—alone.

Still above his head he waved the viceroy's pass, as if it were a message and his young voice rose sharp and clear in a real Yankee yell. Bullets from Chinese mannlichers, bullets from allied mausers piffed and sang past him; but he ran on unharmed, until suddenly, in the clogging, searching sand of the dry and dusty field, he made a misstep and fell flat on his face, the viceroy's pass flying from his hands.

It was a rather ignominious ending to his grand dash for liberty, but Ned scrambled to his feet again and stood, just a bit dazed from his fall, until he could once more get his bearings.

As he looked, a thrill of great joy aroused him to a new excitement and enthusiasm, for, almost dead ahead, straight toward him, almost in line, came a dashing, rushing, overwhelming mass of khaki and campaign hats that Ned recognized at once.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" he shouted. "'Rah, 'rah, 'rah! It's our boys, charging the Chinese. Go in, boys, go in, and win; I'll bet on you! 'Rah for the stars and stripes!"

And he swung Prince Tuan's guardsman's cap excitedly about his head.

Straight on came that splendid rush, the charge of the Fourteenth United States, Colonel Daggett in the lead. One of the rushing line, seeing a single Chinaman in the Imperial uniform standing alone in the way, and shouting excitedly, snapped his pistol at the lad; but Ned sprang out of range and flinging both hands in air, shouted "Don't shoot, boys; don't shoot me! I'm one of you. I'm a runner from the legations!"

Another rousing Yanke cheer burst out, a cheer of welcome and of power, that struck terror into the bannermen behind the Chinese trenches and gave a forward impetus to the dashing charge.

A sergeant sprang from the plunging ranks and grabbed the boy by the arm.

"To the rear, to the rear, lad," he cried. "Get out of our way, we've work on hand."

"Let me go in with you, sergeant," cried Ned. "I'll give 'em one for all we've suffered. Let me give 'em one for the legationers."

Another cheer echoed his speech.

"Great Scott! lad, but you're a daisy," said the sergeant. "In you go," and he almost flung the boy, as he ran, into the second rank. "Are you all safe in Pekin?"

"Safe when I left, but waiting for you," answered Ned breathlessly, at the same time flinging off the skirt and jacket of Prince Tuan's uniform. "Lend me a pistol, somebody. I haven't a thing. The Chinese have looted all my belongings. Hey, Hey! now we go it. They're breaking already. Let me give 'em one for luck."

Straight at the center of the foe sprang the Fourteenth in that superb charge.

"At 'em! Down they go!" shouted the colonel.

"Now then," cried the sergeant. "Hike it up, boys! We'll git the day's work over before dark."

In they went; on they rushed, a resistless thousand in blue and khaki, before whom no Chinese troops, thousands though they were, could stand with equanimity.

There were a few useless shots from the Chinese lines; then the wavering yellow ranks and clumps, the fluttering banners, the spiteful guns at the trenches, turned before the rush could reach them

"Don't shoot, boys; I'm one of you."

and in great clouds of dust, in broken array and with shrieks of fear the whole Chinese army of Tung-fuh-Chan, the resistless general, turned in flight and rushed madly for safety, beyond the flat roofs of Yang-tsun.

The charge was over; the foemen were dispersed; the victorious Fourteenth would have kept on "straight to Pekin," so the sergeant declared. But their work was done; the bugle sounded the recall and beside the captured trenches of Yang-tsun the hot and tired men, with a great cheer of triumph dropped at rest, awaiting further orders.

"How are you, heathen Chinee?" cried one of the men, as he dropped to earth and pulled Ned down beside him. "The old Fourteenth didn't wait for a second invitation, did they, hey, boy?"

"You bet they didn't," replied Ned; "but I emptied all my cartridges at 'em," he said, as he held up his smoking pistol. "Whew—but that was a run. Hello, what's that? Who's firing at us? Are there any Chinks left?"

"Chinks? Chinks be blowed!" cried the soldier. "That's no Chinese fire. That's from our folks. Hey! stop it, stop it there. You're shelling your friends."

"Somebody's firing shrapnel from the rear; they don't know it's all over," said the sergeant angrily. "Now, who in the dickens—I'll bet it's them Rus-

sians; they're always up to some fool thing. Hey! tell 'em to stop it. Blast 'em, they're plowing right into us."

Whoever was sending those shots from the rear was indeed "plowing into" the victorious Fourteenth. The soldier beside whom Ned had dropped, rolled over with a yell and a torn shoulder; seven more went down, even as the horrified Ned struggled to his feet; three dead and four wounded by the fire of their friends. Such things have happened before; it is one of the blunders of war; and in this case the victims had almost brought the horror upon themselves, for their charge was over even before the British artillerists—for British they were—had their guns in position to cover the gallant charge.

The colonel sent his staff hurrying back to stop the slaughter; but before the British gunners had seen their mistake twelve great shells had torn into the ranks of the Fourteenth and nearly forty men had gone down, dead or wounded.

"Throwing off his masquerading "pig tail," Ned snatched up a discarded campaign hat, for the sun was beating down fiercely upon the exposed troops, and forgetting his own business, joined the group of the rushing aids and orderlies and dashed back to the allied lines to stop the British shells.

He came near stopping one with his own life, as he ran; but with his usual good fortune he dodged in

time and when the firing ceased he turned to where on the allied right, he recognized the well-known khaki of the Marines and dashing straight for them, well nigh spent, he fell in a faint almost at the feet of his old friend, Captain Marshall and his cheering battalion.

"Great old charge, that, eh?" said the captain, as the lad dropped at his feet. "Used you up, did it? Here! you get into the shade. Lucky for you some of those British shells didn't rip you up the back. Bad blunder that; but you're all right now, eh? Why, hullo, what's your uniform? Where's your khaki? Hanged if this isn't a Chinese rig you've got on, all but your hat. Major, see here, sir; what do you make of this?"

He pulled off the campaign hat that covered Ned's black hair; he turned the boy over and looked at him critically.

"Great Scott!" he almost shouted. "It's that kid again, and in one of the Imperial uniforms. Ned, lad; Ned," he cried, kneeling down beside the boy. "Are you hurt; are you sunstruck; are you—great Heavens! lad, where do you come from?"

The cooling drink, the tender hand, brought the exhausted lad to his senses. Opening his eyes he looked into the captain's anxious ones with a smile of recognition. Then his hand went up in salute.

"I'm—I'm all right, all right, I reckon, Captain," he said. "I will be in a minute. I've run their lines, sir. I'm from the legations at Pekin."

CHAPTER XVII

"ON TO PEKIN"

"FROM the legations; you, Ned?" came the captain's surprised query. "Why how, lad? And when?"

But there came no reply; the boy had swooned again.

The surgeon bent over him.

"Heat prostration and over-excitement, Captain," he said. "He'll come 'round as right as a trivet in a little while. Get him to the hospital, some of you, and I'll have a look at him. We'll have our hands full pretty soon with those victims of the British shells. A shame, wasn't it? And after such a superb charge. By George! I'm proud of the Fourteenth—and all our boys."

"Including this one, if he has come all the way from Pekin," said Captain Marshall. "Get him to the hospital tent, boys, and I'll report to General Chaffee."

That indomitable fighter and splendid soldier when he learned of the surprising arrival of an American from the beleaguered legations, just in

time to join in the dramatic charge of the Fourteenth, made his way to the field hospital under a clump of trees, already filling up with sun-struck men and the fifty or more victims of the Yang-tsun fight.

"Your friend the volunteer aid, is it?" the general said as he looked into Ned's unconscious face. "The chap who was with Lawton in Luzon and with Roberts in the Transvaal? I've heard about him. Bright chap, but always getting into scrapes. Well, that's the kind they make men of. Look after him, Surgeon, and let me know when he's fit to talk. I want to get the latest from Pekin."

And laying a hand on the boy's heated head he passed on, to pause an instant beside the other stricken forms in that improvised hospital; and then he sought his own headquarters, a hundred yards away, where his "strikers" were preparing his dinner and, already, signalmen and coolies were stringing the wires that connected the allied advance with Tongku and the rest of the world.

But when Ned had recovered and was able to go before the general with the latest from Pekin he found that, after all, there were tidings even later than he had brought. His delay at the palace of Prince Tuan, his manifold adventures as he and the German captain had wormed their way through the Chinese lines, and his final detention in the yamen

of the viceroy at Yang-tsun had all consumed so much time that a later messenger from the beleaguered ones had been before him; for, that very day, a Chinese coolie, allowing himself to fall in the hands of the Japanese outpost, had taken from the lining of his sandal two little pieces of paper. One was from the Japanese and the other from the American minister and both told the same tidings, that the legations were still safe though fighting perpetually, with supplies for ten days and an earnest message to the allies for haste, haste!

But Ned's news was quite as important, for it gave details which the coolie could not. He wished to see that coolie, however, and when he had been dismissed, with an equal amount of compliments and cautions, from the presence of the general, Ned started inquiries for "that coolie."

It was of small avail. In an army of twenty thousand soldiers of mixed nationalities, to say nothing of coolies and camp followers, a hunt for an unknown coolie is like the proverbial search for a needle in a hay stack and Ned was obliged to give it up.

But when, at Captain Marshall's order, Ned accompanied the friendly officer of marines to deserted Yang-tsun, now occupied by "foreign devils" and garrisoned by the French marines, Ned was equally startled and surprised to receive a hail from

one of the native huts of Yang-tsun, and the next instant he was shaking hands with the Omaha merchant, Mr. Wong Lee.

"Then you—you were the coolie from Pekin," cried Ned. "Somehow I thought of you, but the last time I saw you was when you were Prince Ching's messenger and turned me loose from Prince Tuan's race course. Tell me all about it."

Thereupon the Omaha merchant told his American friend how it all came to pass. It seems that when Ned went, as his friends in Pekin believed, to his death because he had made a promise, they set to work to devise means for his safety. But none seemed feasible, though the ministers prepared a note of warning, and the commander-in-chief of the handful of defenders was ready to exchange prisoners three to one. Then the Omaha merchant decided to take things into his own hand, and after conference with the German captain they both disappeared over the wall and, by way of the moat and their ready wit and tongues, found hiding in the Tartar city. Here, by the sovereign use of cash and their former business and military connections, the Omaha merchant reappeared in the Pekin streets as the messenger from Prince Ching to Prince Tuan, while the German drill master, in the uniform of an Imperial courier of Prince Tuan's body guard rode the streets of the Tartar city on the lookout for an

escaping American whom his friend Wong hoped to free.

"So it came out right, at last, my brother," the Chinaman said; "but where is our friend, the drill-master?"

"I left him in this very village," Ned replied, "keeping guard over the viceroy Yu-lu, or a prisoner, I can't say which; where is the house?"

They searched the straggling low-roofed town and at last Ned recognized the house which the viceroy had converted into his temporary yamen.

"This is it; I know it, now," Ned exclaimed and the two friends pushed into the building.

It was deserted; no servant or coolie, no guardsman or runner, no Chinese viceroy or German drill-master was found within, alive or dead. But Ned was struck, as he pushed into the apartment which he remembered as the private room of the viceroy, to find beneath the open window through which the viceroy had listened to the distant sounds of battle, the vials which he recalled as near to the viceroy's hand. And the little bottles were empty.

He called the merchant's attention to these, and the Chinaman raised them one after the other to his nose and snuffed at their emptiness.

"Ei, arsenic," he said. "The viceroy, Yu-lu, was never a hero. When your fighters, in the charge that seemed so full of death, rushed upon the de-

fences and defenders of Yang-tsun, Yu-lu believed that he saw himself a prisoner in the hands of the foreigners and took his Honorable and Exalted body out of the trouble by means of those bottles of arsenic."

"Killed himself?" exclaimed Ned.

"Why not?" the Chinaman replied. "Suicide is more honorable than capture. The viceroy must keep his 'face' even though he kill himself—as he doubtless has."

And again he tapped the empty bottles significantly.

"And Ullman—the captain—where is he? Did that villain of a craven viceroy make him take the arsenic, too?" demanded Ned.

"It may be,—who shall say?" the Chinaman replied. "Things are not here as in our America, my son, and the viceroy perhaps invited our friend the German to an honorable taking-off."

"By George! I hope not," exclaimed horrified Ned. "I call such an invitation a regular heathen—I beg your pardon—regular low-down trick, not countenanced by civilized nations or people."

"From your standpoint, perhaps, yes," replied the Chinaman, "but are you the judge? Other lands have other customs you know and have I not said my China is not our America?"

"But if they had a—suicide bee, here," queried

Ned, "where—where are they all? We don't see anything of them."

"Neither do you see any of the viceroy's goods, my son," the Omaha merchant replied. "The valiant Yu-lu has done everything in regulation fashion and departing from a house not his own has passed out of the world or been borne away, after emptying those bottles, as an exalted one of China should—like a gentleman."

Ned shook his head.

"Well, it's a queer world—this China—that's all I can say," he mused. "But I would like to know what has become of the captain."

There was not much time to search or speculate longer; for Captain Marshall having made his observations returned to General Chaffee to report, taking Ned Pevear with him. But the Omaha merchant remained in Yang-tsun.

The Chinaman had, however, given the latest from the legations, from which as a coolie he had come with the message to the allies. He told the American how at last the Tsung-li-yamen had allowed a cablegram from Washington to go to the American minister and how the minister had replied; how the Tsung-li-yamen sent to the besieged fruit, flour and vegetables, which the legationers at first regarded with suspicion, but finally tried without being poisoned; how the Dutch interpreter, Duysberg crawled

out beyond the barriers and came back with a lot of ammunition and one good gun, stolen away almost under the noses of the besieging Chinese; and how the Boxers tried to undermine the Russian legation but were driven back by the marines, with whom, so he told Ned to the lad's great joy, his friend, the English lad, Tom Dickson, had gone as a volunteer, had charged with them against the retreating Boxers and captured still more powder for the legation ammunition chest."

"Good for Tom," cried Ned enthusiastically. "And the yungvrouw Lizbet—the Dutchman's daughter—what of her, my friend?"

But here the Chinaman's information failed. Like most of his countrymen he did not regard women highly enough to follow their doings, and he could only "suppose she was safe," as none of the foreign refugees, so he said, had died or disappeared up to the day of his leaving.

So Ned went back to the camp with Captain Marshall, cheered by the news he had heard and yet a trifle disgusted because the Chinaman had not specially sought out the yungvrouw and brought tidings of her safety.

He was all the more anxious to move forward.

"On to Pekin!" he cried, "How soon do we go there, Captain?"

"Patience, patience, dear boy," Captain Marshall

replied. "Do you think we are out for a pleasure promenade? We're not here for our health; we're here for business, and an army of twenty thousand is not easily moved forward in the enemy's country. The generals are in conference now. In an hour we shall know what we shall know. And our men are dead tired. Twenty-five miles in forty-eight hours under a sun that was worse than the Philippines and with two fights thrown in is a great record. So, hold your horses; we'll be on the march soon enough to suit even a restless wanderer like you, who don't seem to mind even a sunstroke."

Sure enough, in an hour's time, Ned did learn the result of the conference of the generals.

"We are to push on at all cost," Captain Marshall reported, and Ned, now invested once more with the blue and khaki, "like a Christian" he said, indulged in a joyful hurrah.

"Push it is," he said, "and give me a chance at it, too, won't you, Cap'n. I've just lots of things to square up with those Chinks, and my aim is pretty good with a mauser."

But it so happened that Ned Pevear was not to have any call for his mauser, except to register his protest against certain of the lawless ones in the allied ranks who disgraced the name of Christian soldiers by deeds of violence against the poor frightened Chinese men, women and children

who trusted to their honor and came across their path.

From Tien Tsin to Yang-tsun, to Ho-si-wu and Mah-to, to Chang-Chia-wan and at last to Tung-Chow the allied flags pressed forward, and not a Chinese force disputed the advance. The charge of the Fourteenth was the last pitched battle between Yang-tsun and Tung-Chow, and the only enemies the allies found to wrestle with were the withering heat, the choking dust, and the deadly weariness that comes of rapid marching under exhausting conditions.

Even Ned's feet grew tired and his spirits drooped under this ceaseless advance.

"Talk about relieving Pekin; who's going to relieve us?" grumbled one of his chums in the fighting Fourteenth.

"Get up and mosey along, you hobo," growled Ned's old friend the sergeant who had picked him up in the charge, as he fairly "yanked" the tired grumbler from the ground where he had thrown himself. "Get up and hike it on. You don't know what marching is. The only way to get you to march is to let you straggle out in the fields and roast corn and tell you there's a good barn to sleep in where we're going to camp. Why, Jonesy, old boy, I just mosey along, not thinking I'm in China, but imagine I'm strolling in the shade of the barracks at

old Fort Riley. Hike along or I'll get a club and make a soldier of you. You bet there won't be a man of you falling out when we march into Pekin! You'll all want to see the show then."

So discipline conquered grumbling, and the tired army moved on, British and Yankee fighters grumbling the most but "getting there" just the same—their only rivals in push, but without a grumble, being the wiry little Japs, spurred on by the restless energy of their leader, the tireless, determined Fukushima.

It was on one of the hottest days of the hot march that Ned was ordered to convey a message to the Japanese commander and, panting and weary-eyed, delivered it.

The courteous leader, as he returned his answer, noticed the "tired look" that lined the face of the messenger.

"The American feels the Chinese heat, eh?" he said, with a smile and in excellent English. "Try to keep up your spirit—we'll get there at last, my lad."

Ned saluted.

"I know it, sir," he said. "But you have marched us pretty hard, General, and—we're all of us very tired."

The remorseless Japanese smiled again, and somehow his smile reassured and enlivened the wearied American.

"Ah, yes," he said, "we are tired; but the enemy, he is very tired too. We are hot; but the Chinese, they are hot, too. And, listen, my son, the enemy, he is scared; and we are not scared, eh? Is it not so? If we keep on, the enemy will only know that we are not scared; he will not know that we are tired. We shall be much stronger as he sees us than we really are; and his forces will scatter so that he will not dare even to make a determined stand before Pekin. Tell you that to your comrades, and it will march them into Pekin."

The argument was as sound as it was prophetic. It helped to brace up Ned Pevear, and he used it with good effect as he cheerily joined with his grumbling comrades and pushed up the stragglers.

And so at last they came to Tung-Chow, only a dozen miles or so from Pekin, the city where the German drillmaster and his "lieutenant" Ned had stolen a Chinese detachment and led it away from its duty.

Ned had never been able to square himself with his conscience over that questionable practise of Captain Ullman, with his false orders and what Ned styled his "big whoppers" and the way in which he overcame the Chinese officials by misleading and untruthful statements. To Ned, who had been brought up to tell the truth and hate a lie, all this manœuvring had seemed wrong, even while he benefited

by it, and the only way in which he could excuse himself was to repeat the old proverb that "all's fair in war."

He had laid it before Captain Marshall with but little real satisfaction.

"That's a hard question, Ned," the captain said. "It's one of the demoralizations of war, you see. To gain an end we must often use questionable means—decoys—spies, and all that. You've got to baffle the enemy as well as bluff him, and such measures as your German friend resorted to have their effect quite as much as that glorious charge of the Fourteenth in which you took a hand. It's my idea that you'll find even worse things to trouble you when this allied army is let loose in Pekin. What with Sikhs, and Rajputs, and Punjabis, and Cossacks and Annamites, to say nothing of the 'Christian' nations represented in our ranks by some very conscienceless scalawags, I'm afraid Pekin will see a sad exhibition of lawlessness and even murder—especially if anything has happened to the legations."

"But nothing has happened to them, Captain," cried Ned, with falling heart; "they're all right yet; don't you think so?"

"We can hope so, Ned," the captain replied. "But what do we really know? We haven't really heard anything since your friend, the alleged coolie

came into Yang-tsun with the message in his shoe. By the way, where is he now?"

"I've lost him again, Captain," Ned replied. "I have not seen him since we left Yang-tsun. He's got something on his mind, I reckon. Perhaps he's hunting up my lost friend, the drill-master."

Thereupon the captain went off to wait for orders at the conference of the generals, and Ned, left to himself, wandered through the stone-walled "port of Peking," Tung-Chow, whose defenders had run away even before the Japanese advance could get a shot at them. But the Japs with a display of their exhaustless energy simply "gun-cottoned" the undefended gate of Tung-Chow and blew it up, just in the way of a salute.

The American lad walked through the deserted streets, empty save for the foreign soldiers who had come within the walls, and deserted by the terrified inhabitants as were all the towns and villages from Peitsang to Tun-Chow. Some of the soldiers were looting the houses, though, as there was little chance to carry anything away, the most of the "relief force" was waiting for the greater opportunity to "relieve" the property owners of Pekin; but looting had never had any attraction for Ned Pevear; in the first place it was not right; and in the second place there were orders to respect private property which the Americans, at least, tried to obey.

He was thinking of Tom Dickson and yung-vrouw Lizbet in Pekin, a dozen miles away, and hoping that the order to march would come speedily.

Suddenly, as he was inspecting the closed front of one of the better class of residences, which seemed securely barricaded against visitors and looters, he heard a bar drop; then a door opened cautiously and he saw a beckoning finger thrust out.

Ned stopped; but he did not go in; he had learned wisdom from experience; no more Chinese traps for him, he said.

The door opened wider, and a face was thrust out.

"In brother; come in quietly, my friend," came the invitation. "Here is one for you to see." And Ned, by no means surprised, for he was getting used to these sudden appearances of the Omaha merchant, entered without delay, and slipped in through the half-open door which was quickly closed and barred again after his entrance.

"I have found him," Wong Lee said; "the drill-master, my friend; he has been calling for you and I knew not where to seek you."

"Calling for me? Captain Ullman? Why, what is the matter?" demanded Ned.

"It is the end, I fear," the Chinaman said. "The viceroy, Yu-lu, tried to poison our friend when he conveyed himself out of danger and the world; but the captain resisted and, set upon by the viceroy's

guards as a traitor to the Emperor he was badly wounded and was carried in the retreat as far as Tung-Chow, reserved for justice from Prince Tuan, whom he had misrepresented as a false courier. But the allies were too speedy, and when the Japanese advance rushed upon Tung-Chow the soldiers fled in fright and our captain was forgotten. Here I found him for I have been searching for him and I have brought him here—to the house of one of my correspondents to which I found entrance. His old wounds, those which he received on the legation wall, are opened afresh, and with the new and the old he is fading away."

"Great grief! That's too bad," cried Ned. "Hold on! Wong, let me out. I'll get our surgeon and bring him here at once."

"Too late, too late, my brother," said the Chinaman sadly. "Nothing can save him now. But he yearns for a sight of you. Come, come at once or it may be too late."

Stretched upon a pile of mats, laid upon the oven-like bed in one of the private apartments of the house, Ned found the captain.

The poor man was near his last gasp, but he smiled upon the lad and stretched out a welcoming hand.

"It is come—the end, Herr Ned," he said; "but you are safe, yes? Have I not returned good for good to him who spared my life at Tien Tsin and

protected me from my own? Dear lad, I thank you. But I—I led the Boxers; if I might only see the flag of the Fatherland; if I could only die beneath it. Can you not perhaps bring me one, yes?"

"Let me bring a doctor, first,—our surgeon, Cap'n," cried Ned with tear-filled eyes.

"No, no, Herr Ned," came the pleading answer. "For that it is now too late. The flag; the flag. See, I will live till it come to me," and the dying man drew in a long breath of will as if to strengthen him.

Ned rushed to the door, unbarred it and darted out, the Omaha merchant standing guard. He scarce knew what to do, for there were no Germans in the advance. But he blundered into the first squad of allies he saw, encamped in the streets of the town. They were Russians.

"Have you perhaps a German flag among your signals?" he inquired, first in English and then in uncertain French.

"And for whom, little brother?" queried the Russian major.

"For one who dies saddened without a sight of it —a brave German. Haste, haste, I pray you. Have you it?"

The major was turning over the camp chest. He flung out a tangle of flags of varying nationalities, and with a cry of satisfaction, Ned pounced upon a German ensign.

"May I? Will you lend it me?" he asked. "It shall come back at once."

"Keep it, little brother," said the major. "Let it serve as shroud for him who, far from home, is loyal to his flag," and raising his hat, the Russian bowed to the American, and Ned was soon speeding back to the bedside of the German captain.

The dying man smiled as Ned approached him, the ensign in hand.

"And I knew he would find it; I knew it," Ullman said, half raising himself in the bed and pressing the flag to his lips. "See, I have retrieved myself; is it not so? I am no Boxer, no leader of foreign foes against my flag; I have helped to save the legations; I have revenged the death of the Minister of my Emperor; I have aided you, my friend; I die a German."

With feeble arm, strengthened for an instant by the excitement of the moment, the German drill-master of Chinese troops raised the flag and shook it feebly. "*Germania! das Vaterland! Hoch der Kaiser!*" he cried, and dropped back—dead, the flag of his homeland falling across his breast.

"He has retrieved everything," murmured Ned, tears standing in his eyes. "Good-bye, Captain. You meant to do the best, sir."

And the living saluted the dead.

CHAPTER XVIII

WITHIN THE GATES

THE loud notes of a bugle broke suddenly upon the silence of the death chamber. Ned started from the bedside.

"It is the call for assembly," he said; "it means off for Pekin and I must report to Captain Marshall at once. May I leave our friend in your charge, good Wong Lee? I will ask Captain Marshall to send a firing squad and have the captain buried like a soldier."

"Your duty is yonder, my brother," the Omaha merchant replied. "Rest well in mind as to our friend here. I will see that he is put away with all respect, and if your worthy captain will see that he has the honors of a soldier, it will be but his deserts. For what said Confucius, the master? 'When you have faults do not fear to abandon them.' Our friend did not fear; though misjudged he tried to do aright. He died with honor. It is to us a lesson also. Farewell, my young brother; I will see to all here. We shall meet again, if all shall go well."

Depressed, yet, somehow, uplifted by the solemn scene he had just witnessed, Ned wrung the Chinaman's hand in farewell and hastened to Captain Marshall.

He had conjectured rightly. That bugle call meant Pekin. By four roads in four columns the final advance of the allies marched out from Tung-Chow. Chaffee and his Americans took the road to the south of the canal, while on the roadway south of them marched the British contingent, the jackies hauling the big guns on whose carriages was spread the announcement: "From Ladysmith to Pekin."

Both these roads led to the gates of the outer or Chinese city and Britishers and Yankees raced for the lead.

Nearer and nearer they came; the words of the old sergeant of the Fourteenth to his "hoboes" as he spurred them on "you bet there won't be a man of you falling out the day we get to Pekin" were prophetic; every eye was clear, every step was brisk, and when Ned, listening for any sign of life ahead, caught the low, sullen, far-off boom of the guns he leaped with joy.

"It's all right, all right," he cried. "They're firing at 'em still, the legations haven't given in yet. I hope they're all alive behind the walls."

He was to learn the truth even sooner than he expected. For the Russians instead of stopping in their

assigned camp, five miles from Pekin, as had been arranged in conference, and joining in the general attack at daylight next day, broke the agreement and without notifying the other allies, pushed on to the Eastern Gate of the capital.

They paid dearly for their breach of faith, for when in the middle of the night they arrived at the Eastern Gate and found it practically undefended, they determined not to wait for the co-operation of the Americans who were to join with them, but forthwith trained their Maxims on the gate and battered it down. The Chinese ran before them, but when the Russians charged for the Hatu-men Gate, which Ned had once slipped through in his "baby basket," the defenders had rallied in force and as daylight broke, the Russians fell back badly crippled, and the Tartar Gate remained untaken.

The Japanese heard the news and, enraged at the Russian action, sent post haste to the American and British columns. The Americans had outstripped their British brothers and when Chaffee heard the Japanese report he acted at once, and rushed his men along the road until at last the walls of Pekin were in sight.

There was firing everywhere. The boom of guns from the beleaguered legations, where all through the night a furious mob had shot and charged, and yelled and thundered in vain, came down on the wind

only to be lost in the greater roar of the advance of the allies banging away at the eastern and southern walls.

The Russian guns were thundering at the Tang-pien *mun,* or gate; the Japanese were banging away at the Chi-hau-mun, and having the hardest fight of all, for against their hereditary foemen the Chinese made the strongest resistance; the Americans, coming to the moat, saw no gate at all, but as the defenders of the wall spied their approach they raked the boys in blue and khaki with a furious sniping fire, which made more noise than damage, though a few of the Fourteenth went down.

It was with his friends of the Fourteenth that Ned Pevear came to the moat and the wall. For when Captain Marshall found that the marines and the Ninth were to be held back for a charge under cover of Reilly's battery, he despatched Ned to General Chaffee as one acquainted with the legation grounds to await his orders and be of service in any way he might.

Nothing loth to be well in the advance Ned raced along the roadway until he came up with the Fourteenth lining the moat and replying to the Chinese fire from the wall. The general, he found, had gone forward on a scout of his own, and Colonel Daggett of the Fourteenth was in a bit of a quandary.

To him Ned reported.

"Know the place, eh?" said the colonel. "Well, where's the nearest gate? That's the one we want to tackle."

"Quite a ways up the moat, sir," Ned replied; "but there's a nearer way in than that; only it's dirty."

"Dirty, is it? Well," the colonel laughed as he looked on his travel-worn men, "we're not afraid of dirt, I guess. We haven't any of us had our clothes off for ten days and it's hard to tell which is blue and which is khaki. But I guess the legation people won't mind if we aren't just fit for dress parade. Where's your dirty gate?"

"It isn't really a gate, sir," Ned replied, "it's pretty well up toward the legation grounds and it's the big drainage arch, the sewer opening—sluice-gate they call it, where the drainage comes into the moat. If it isn't too dirty you could go through."

"Sluice-gate—drainage? Phew! that doesn't sound real inviting; but show it to us; we can go through it, if we don't have to swim."

Ned showed them the arch of the sluice-gate opening across the moat, and one by one two companies of the Fourteenth ran across the almost dry moat, the colonel and the regimental colors leading.

Ned was in his element. He was scout and guide in the lead in the great movement he had so long looked forward to,—but he did wish it was some-

thing better than a sewer that gave the Yankees entrance.

Once through the arch the crumbling inner wall stopped the boys but an instant. Ned and the color bearer scrambled up like squirrels using as steps the holes made by loosened and fallen bricks. Hand over hand they went, each lending a hand or a shoulder to the others, until a dozen of the advance had clambered to the very top; and, just as the Russian flag went up in triumph over the Tung-pien gate, the regimental colors of the fighting Fourteenth were planted on the wall above the sluice-gate.

A storm of Yankee hurrahs filled the air; ropes were made into slings; and guns and equipment were hoisted up. They were in the city at last.

Then Ned began to fret and fume. The colonel could not go farther without orders while the general was still "on the scout"; and, worse than all, while messengers were despatched to find him and secure orders, the turbaned Sikhs of the British contingent came straggling through the sluice-gate and passed the waiting Americans.

Ned cheered and grumbled as the British contingent took the right of way.

"Those night-capped Injuns will be in before us, after all," he said. "I wonder if I can't go with them? I'll ask the colonel."

He did so forthwith. And when the colonel heard

that the lad had friends among the legationers and knew that there was no real necessity for his volunteer scout to wait further orders, he gave a willing consent.

"Go on, my boy," he said. "Just tell 'em we'll see 'em later."

And with a salute Ned dashed after the British column.

"Colonel Daggett's compliments, sir—Colonel Daggett of the Americans," Ned said with his best salute to one of the British officers of the dusty East Indian advance; he begs you to permit me to go in with you. I am one of his volunteer aids and I have friends in the legation."

"You're heartily welcome, lad," the British officer replied. "Who are your friends there?"

"Tom Dickson is one, sir," Ned answered. "He's one of Sir Robert Hart's customs men, and his father is British Consul at Valencia."

"Oh, yes; I know young Dickson," said the officer; "he was with us at Tien Tsin, don't you know. You're jolly welcome here if you are a friend of his. Get forward to the head of the column and you'll be in all the sooner."

Ned strode beside his new friend "well up to the head" and was speedily marching through the throng of enthusiastic welcomers in that "nervous, happy time," as one spectator described it, when, af-

ter weeks of dreadful suspense within and without the walls, the first of the allied relief marched into the grounds of the British legation. For, after all, the relief that the world supposed would be the rush and charge of bloody fighting was but a walk-in, a parade of travel-stained and wearied soldiers through a well-dressed company of smiling and welcoming ladies and gentlemen.

Ned heard a hearty hail and a joyful shout of greeting as his eye sought for his friends. The next instant Tom Dickson had him about the neck and was shaking hands with exultant energy.

"Why, hello there! you jolly old Sikh!" cried Tom. "What are you doing under the British flag? You murdering old son of a Punjabi, were you killed as I thought you were and have you transmigrated into a turbaned Sikh? My hat! Ned; but I never thought to see you again, dear boy. Where are your people?"

"O," said Ned, "they're just behind! We made way for these chaps so that the English flag could go first into the British legation, of course. How's everybody? How's—the yungvrouw?"

"Who?—O, Lizbet? she's allright, allright, as you Yankees say. She"—

"She's waiting to welcome Mynheer Ned," the girl broke in upon Tom Dickson's assurances; "and so glad to see you again, my friend."

And then Ned was greeting the girl, not so athletically, perhaps, as he had greeted Tom Dickson, but fervently and heartily, while tears of joy and thankfulness stood in the eyes of both—and even in Tom Dickson's too; for Tom did have his sentimental side.

Then other friends came forward—the ministers who thought they had sent the American lad to his death, the ladies who remembered him well, the children, the guards, even the coolies and servants who were in the welcoming crowd.

Then, there was quiet for a while, and again came the shouting and cheering as, with General Chaffee at their head, the American "relievers" marched into the British grounds—tired, dirty, hard-looking, but glad to know that their work was done and so well done, though somewhat embarrassed to find themselves so much more disreputable looking as to cleanliness and clothing than were those they supposed to be ragged, worn, even starving and at the point of death.

"What have we got into, Tom—a garden party?" queried Ned. "By George. You folks have dressed for the occasion, and we—why—we look like a lot of tramps."

"Who have tramped to good advantage, my son," said Sir Robert Hart, who overheard the remark. "And you see the siege has taught us things. We

couldn't be off to the hills, don't you know. Our Chinese neighbors objected. So we have found out that Pekin is a fine summer resort."

"And you know you *can* eat horse-steak if you have to; eh, yungvrouw?" said Tom Dickson as the three friends walked away.

"Hunger is a good sauce, Mynheer," the Dutch girl replied; "we did well, because we must, you see."

"And you were brave because you couldn't help it," said Ned. "I think you women and girls are just as much the heroes of the siege as the fighters on the wall; eh, Tom?"

"Every time," the English lad replied. "You see they weren't so afraid for us as we were for them. That gave us the shivers. It wasn't so much the food, don't you know; we could get along all right on that; it wasn't the danger of a fight with those bloody Boxers; we were more'n a match for them. But the thought of the women and children, and what they were going through and what they might have to suffer if we were starved out and overpowered—that was what gave us the blues. But now it's all right, thank God."

"Thank the good God, indeed," the young girl said fervently. "It was just a horrid dream. But now it is over since—since Mynheer Ned and his brave comrades have come to us."

"There you are, Ned; you did it all, you see," cried Tom Dickson with a hearty laugh.

Ned Pevear fairly blushed.

"And now, what next?" he said, to turn the subject. "We've relieved the legations. What about the emperor? I had a great scheme to kidnap him, but Cap'n Ullman didn't take any stock in it."

"Ullman—the German?" cried Tom; "that's so, where is he?" I haven't seen him yet."

Ned told the story of the captain's death and the adventures that had led up to it.

"My hat! but that's too bad," said Tom. "He was a good fellow; and if he did make a mistake, by Jove! sir, he paid for it nobly."

And the yungvrouw Lizbet dropped a tear to the memory of her father's friend. "It was the way he would hope to die, I think," she said. "He fought for us well, here; and for the poor converts in the Wu.

"Well, I suppose the next thing is to clear out the Imperial city and just provost the town," said Ned.

"You won't need to kidnap the emperor, Ned," Tom assured him. "He and his dear relative, the empress, gave us the go-by a week ago. They're creaking off north somewhere in carts, hunting for shelter, by now."

"And Prince Tuan?" queried Ned; but Tom did

not answer, for just at that moment he linked arms with an old friend, Wong Lee, the Omaha merchant.

"Always turning up at the right moment, aren't you, Mr. Wong?" cried Ned. "What say you now?"

"What said I ever, O, brother?" the Omaha merchant replied. "To help you to the relief of your people here in Pekin, that is good; that I would help you bring about. But now where is poor China? At the mercy of those who would covet, loot and carve her."

"I hope not," said Ned. "We are not here for plunder; we are here for relief and punishment. Hang the guilty ones, I say, and then good-bye and good riddance. What's the use of rubbing it in?"

The courteous Chinaman gave the Asiatic motion of dissent.

"Ah, but the others of your allies, they are not like you," he said. "To them it is a joy to, as you say, rub it in. These men of India, of Annam, of the Cossack steppes—think you they will be satisfied to go away empty-handed? You shall see—you shall see."

That was just what Captain Marshall had said; and Ned did see, very soon. For, when the final attack had scattered the last of the Chinese defenders entrenched in the Forbidden City; when the brave

Reilly, whose famous battery had been planted on the wall above the Chen-man gate had fallen dead in the arms of Major Waller, the allies' crowning sacrifice to relief and triumph; when the Americans had battered down the gate into the Forbidden City, and Russians and Japanese, Frenchmen and Germans, Italians and Austrians, British and Americans, in "Sunday clothes," with blaring bands and streaming banners had marched through the gates of the Forbidden City—until that day of triumph a "tabooed" place to all "foreign devils," high and low; when the halls of the Imperial palace, the groves and grottoes of China's "holy of holies" had been invaded by the ranks of the allied nations who had humbled China's pride and cowed the haughty Manchus—then began the carnival of loot and greed which seemed so inconsistent with Christian civilization and Christian methods.

Ned Pevear had no desire for this sort of thing. A little jade ornament, a plate or a Chinese mat, taken simply as mementoes of a great event in history and a crowning achievement in arms—these he might covet and even take away; but "stealing as a science"—that he could not and would not subscribe to.

"Where's the harm, Ned?" Tom Dickson said. "If we don't get our share of these things, the Chinese mob will, when once we give 'em a chance; and

'to the victors belong the spoils,' you know. That's good American doctrine, isn't it?"

"Not in this way," Ned replied. "Besides, General Chaffee won't allow it. The American soldier, he says, has the sense of the right of property drilled into his very bones, and he must live up to it. I heard the general pitch into one of our boys in great shape, just because he saw him going into a silk warehouse which the Sikhs and Cossacks were looting."

"Yes, and when that soldier dropped his find, I'll wager you a dozen Chinamen gathered it all in and laughed at the American for throwing away what he had once got his hands on."

"I don't care, right is right," said Ned; "and I think the general's right every time."

Ned had marched beside the Marines into the Imperial city and through the palace grounds in all the glory of the final triumph; he had worked hard, fighting the filth and confusion of the quarter assigned to the guardianship of the American troops, and he had spent much of his leisure among such of his friends in the legation grounds as had not left in the foreign exodus that followed the capture of Pekin.

Mynheer Verbockhoven and his daughter the yungvrouw Lizbet, had been of those who remained. The good Dutchman's interests in the city were too

great to desert, and as one who had lived through many experiences of uprising and lawlessness in his Asiatic homes, he took all things philosophically, looking out for number one and making profit out of the things that came his way.

"We cannot reform the world in a day, my friend," he said to Ned Pevear. "That is the American desire, perhaps, but it is too hasty for the best results. Your brother allies and their colonial soldiers have not the fine sense of property rights that some of you restless Americans have. We must take things as we find them and leave it to time to change wrong into right. Hence, if any man has taken from the city of a conquered foeman what he thinks is the victor's spoil, and has no use for it except to turn it into money—why I am here with funds. I will buy it to save it."

"As, I, too, have done," the Omaha merchant declared. "I have despatched three junk loads thus purchased to my house at Tien-Tsin, and much profit shall I make in the American market. Who knows? This may open the door to a new life for my people. The breeze of civilization, even on the wings of loot, may blow into my China and remake it—if the allies leave anything to remake."

This was more than Ned would subscribe to, but he, too, grew less combative of the methods of those not of his way of looking at things and partially ac-

cepted his Dutch friend's declaration that the world could not be reformed in a day.

But he did not yield to the temptation that led many good men from the straight way. So while Tom Dickson was deep in his many duties under the eye of Sir Robert Hart, Ned, although he, too, found much to do to help in keeping peace and order in the American section, passed much of his spare time in the pleasant quarters of his friends, the Verbockhovens, and became so frequent a visitor there as to call forth from his English comrade much good-natured chaffing and teasing.

But Ned did not care.

"It shows my good taste, old chap," he said to Tom, "the yungvrouw, Lizbet, is much more interesting than silk warehouses and dirty old palaces, and she is much better company that Sikhs or Annamites and looting soldiers."

But at last came the day when Captain Marshall was ordered back to Taku, and Ned, he said, must go with him.

"You've been here too long, my boy," he said. "Home is the best place for you. What does your father say?"

"He says so, too," Ned replied. "My last letters from him announce that if my time's up and you can spare me there are plenty of home duties calling me. He says college is ahead of me, and, next to

relieving the suffering, comes finishing my education."

"Well," laughed the captain, "relieving the suffering under the allied flags came mighty near to finishing you more than once. I think you'd better get back to America and try the effect of a little healthy quiet on your strenuous nature. You're in my care, you know, and I'm going to ship you home as soon as I can—much as I hate to have you go. You've been as good as a play to me, Ned, with a climax at the end of every act."

"My hat! old chap, but I'm mighty sorry to say good-bye," said Tom Dickson, as the day for leave-taking arrived. "Hanged if I don't think you could get more schooling in the university of the world, as my pater calls life, than in any American college. But I 'spose your people know best. Anyhow, I know one thing, you're just as good a chap to tie to as Don Martin was, and some day I hope we three fellows can meet. By Jove! when I go back home next year, as I hope to, on leave, I'm going by the way of the States and just hunt you two chaps up and bring you together. And won't we have a picnic? Well, we will, just."

"Good-bye, Herr Ned," the yungvrouw said, as the hands of the two young people lingered just a bit longer than was necessary in a last adieu. "May it be *auf wiedersehen* with us, as the Germans say,

rather than farewell. I shall never forget your bravery in helping us here, and the risks you ran in trying to bring about our relief. But I think that your going back with that message to the 'Prince Ching and others,' though it was going almost surely into the face of death, was the bravest of all; for that was a matter of honor, and, do you know, I believe that to keep your word and do your duty are about the bravest things a man can do—and you are almost a man, Herr Ned."

"I hope I won't be before I see you again, yungvrouw," replied Ned, just a bit sheepishly. "But I shall always say that you women and girls were the real heroes—or heroines—of the siege. It is easy enough to fight—when you have something to fight for; but it's bravest of all to work and be patient as you were when you did not know what might happen. Do you know what is my choicest of all the souvenirs I'm taking home with me? No? It's one of those silk sand bags you made for me to take to the wall. I found it the other day when we were clearing away the barricades. I knew it, because you worked your initials on it for me, you know, and I'm going to give it a place of honor, as a trophy of calmness in peril and of real courage in a time of distress."

"Good-bye, brother," said Wong Lee, the Chinaman. "But it is not good-bye, I hope. For when I can do so, within this next year, I am going to

Omaha to look after my American business, and it is you I shall find and see, companion of my adventures, heedless but honorable one, unquiet but true. How things shall be ended here, who shall say? The nations of the earth will quarrel over downfallen China; a world war may grow from it, for men will not willingly give up what once they have possessed themselves of, and, save perhaps the Americans, all the allied nations will keep a firm grip on my native land, fearful to let go, lest the others get more than they should. But the American I trust and honor; and proud I am to know that I too am of that noble land, if not by birth then by residence, perhaps by adoption. May I not say by adoption, my son?"

"Sure!" replied Ned, grasping the proffered hand of the Chinaman with hearty enthusiasm. "I owe my life to you, over and over again, and he who has done me such service is my brother, every time."

So at last the good-byes were all said and Ned Pevear, riding down the streets where he had known peril and hair-breadth escape—not now smuggled in a bale on a camel's back nor cramped in a humiliating "baby basket," but with the escort of Marines and under the folds of the flag—took the eastward way by Tien-Tsin and Taku over the Pacific to the welcome and the security of home.

The problem of China, the rivalries of nations, the question of imperialism and the future of his own

homeland as a world power troubled him but little. An enthusiastic believer in the strength and glory of the republic of which he sought to be a worthy son, he was after all but a boy, in spite of all his experiences and of all his adventures. He believed he had done his duty in helping to relieve the beleaguered legations within the gates of Pekin; but duty really had been but the cloak for desire; and the excitement and fun of the campaign outweighed with him even the stern reasons that had taken him into the muddy Pei-ho and the danger he had seen in the troubled land of the Flowery Kingdom.

So he went back, once more, to the quiet of home and the less exciting duties of school and college.

"But if ever the chance comes again," he declared to his father as the two exchanged experiences and "swapped" stories, "I tell you, sir, you can count me in. It stirs a fellow's blood to go through such things, and it's worth a lot of risk and a lot of danger to make such good friends as Tom Dickson, and poor Captain Ullman, and Wong Lee, the Omaha merchant—and—the yungvrouw Lizbet Verbockhoven."

Whereupon his father smiled. For he, too, had, in his young days, run many risks, loved adventures, and—made and kept friendships.

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